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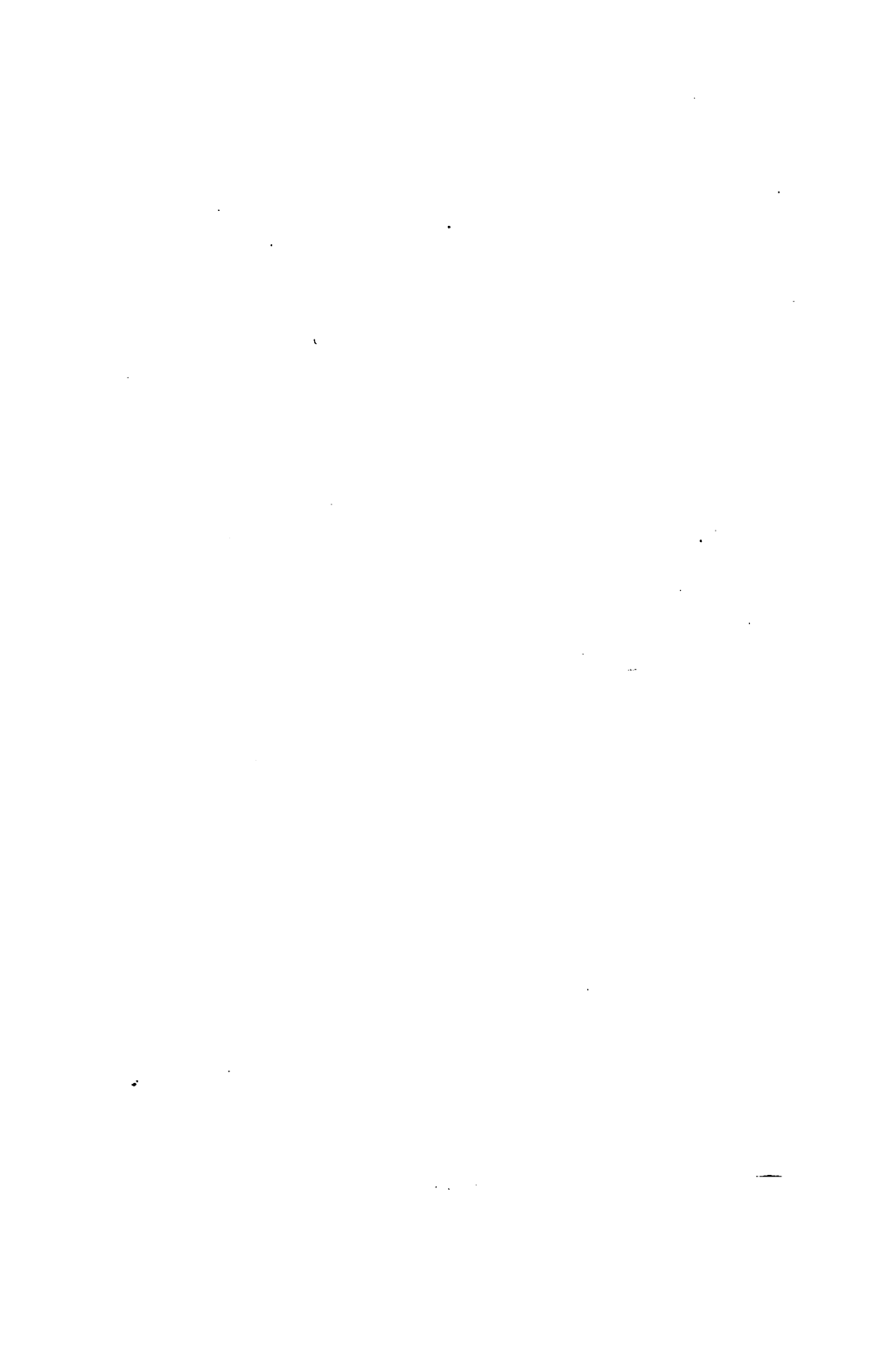


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A LEGEND
OF
NORTH DEVON.

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THE SEPARATION.

HARTLAND FOREST:

A LEGEND OF NORTH DEVON.

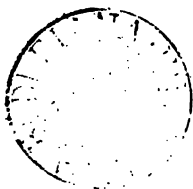
BY

MRS. BRAY,

AUTHOR OF 'THE REVOLT OF THE CEVENNES,' 'THE GOOD ST. LOUIS,'
'THE WHITE HOODS,' 'TRIALS OF THE HEART,'
'BORDERS OF THE TAMAR AND THE TAVY,'
'LIFE OF STOTHARD,' ETC.

'You have heard of such a spirit ; and well you know
The superstitious idle-headed eld
Received, and did deliver to our age
This tale for truth.'

Shakespeare.



LONDON:
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1871.

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HARTLAND FOREST.



CHAPTER I.

He that with injury is grieved,
And goes to law to be relieved,
Is sillier than a sottish chouse,
Who, when a thief has robb'd his house,
Applies himself to cunning men,
To help him to his goods again.

Builer's 'Hudibras.'

OLD SIR THOMAS FAIRLAND, of Northleigh Hall, near Exeter, in the county of Devon, and his neighbour, both in land and residence, old Squire Goldburn, of Southmead House, disputed, quarrelled, and went to law about a hedge, a gate, and a cartway between their estates, which, unhappily for themselves, and most happily for the gentlemen of the profession, attorneys, solicitors, and barristers, were contiguous. The contact, like many a one of a much higher nature, was too close for peace; and after more than

seven years' disputation, removals from sessions to sessions and court to court, after contesting every point and splitting every straw of the contest with the most delicate tact of quibble, shift, and quirk, after some hundreds spent on both sides, with, at the end of the time, just as near an approach to the termination of the cause as there was at the beginning, the principals began to weary of that most tedious of all wars—a war of the gown instead of the sword.

Whilst both were thus heartily sick of John Doe and Richard Roe and all the costly fictions of the law, fortune did them a good turn; she sent them a journey to London together in the same rumbling vehicle, at the time of which we write (A.D. 1720) one of the earliest and oldest stage-coaches in England. It was nothing less than one of a celebrated set which were thus described and advertised in 'The Evening Post' of the period:—

'London, Bath, and Bristol stage-coaches performed by Thomas Baldwin, citizen and cooper of London, living now at the Crown Inn, at Slough, near Windsor, being the Bowling

Green House; goes from the Saracen's Head in Friday Street, and from the One Bell Inn behind the New Church near the Maypole in the Strand, and Mr. John Tillies in Swan Yard at the Coach and Horses over against Somerset House, for the White Hart Inn near the Town's End in Bristol, and at the White Hart Inn near the King's Bath in Bath, for London; and for the better accommodation and conveniency for travellers to and from the places above said, on Monday the 28th instant April 1720, begins FLYING from the above said places every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday during the FLYING SEASON, which is a performance never before done. Likewise a THREE DAYS' COACH. Note the same coachman goes through to Bath and from Bath to London.*

The above-named worthies set off together on the same day, and in the same coach, which, notwithstanding all its boasted rapidity, did not get on quite so fast as the speed of a modern railway. Sir Thomas Fairland and old Squire Goldburn, after arranging their legs with much courtesy so as to sit without inconvenience opposite to each other, somehow or other conceived the bright idea that, as neither of them needed their attorney to settle

* Copied from the original advertisement.

their amicable adjustment of a footing in the stage-coach, even so might they manage to settle their other difficulty without further interference on the part of the gentlemen of the long robe and still longer bills.

Sir Thomas, who was a bit of a humorist, at least so considered at the Bowling Green Club, said something to that effect to his neighbour Goldburn. As the latter worthy answered, with an encouraging allusion to the old fable (and thus used by him it was a gracious simile), that whilst two dogs were quarrelling for a bone, a mongrel intruder often managed to step in and run away with it, their friendly intercourse improved more rapidly than did the pace of the flying coach; and that day, when they dined together on the road (ample time was then given for such a refecton to the traveller), over a social bowl of punch they positively once and for ever made up the dispute. The following were the terms of agreement, viz., that as Sir Thomas Fairland had an only child, a son, and Squire Goldburn an only child, a daughter, these children should inter-

marry, and thus, by a union of interests, make one hereafter of their estates, and so settle all difficulties.

The thing was decided ; they shook hands upon it over an extra bowl of punch ; and old Mr. Goldburn undertook to have his daughter Sarah home from school, and Sir Thomas Fairland promised to write forthwith to his son John, who was at Oxford, to bid him come down into the country with all speed. The lawyers were to be relieved of their present labours and to have a pleasanter job for all parties given them, though a far less profitable one for themselves, in drawing the marriage articles for a speedy wedding. Sir Thomas fulfilled his promise in the following epistle, which for the benefit of such of our readers as may be desirous to inspect documents of this description, we give just as it came into our own hands.

To Mr. John Fairland, Batchelor of Arts, Exon College, Oxford.

May 31st, 1720.

Son John,—I have yours of the 25th instant, which is soe hastily wrote, soe full of blots and blurs, that I could hardly read it. Had I not formerly received from you some

of the same complexion, I should have believed it writ by a school boy rather than by a University scholar and a Batchelor of Arts ; and that not to a father, but to the most ignorant of inferiors. The reason of my not answering your former letter and sending you a bill, is your neglecting to give me a full and partickler account how you have disposed of the Thirty-seven pounds three shillings and sixpence which I have supplied you with since the 10th day of February last, which methinks you should have thought yourself obliged for to do in point both of duty and interest. Thirty-seven pounds three shillings and sixpence out of my pocket in four months time I find to be a very great sum of money, and what I am a long time a getting together; and lastly, it is but reasonable I should know how it has been applied. Not only you, but many other things—such as making the new cart road, my law suits, and the new pound at Goose Green—have been very expensive, and tenants don't pay and farms don't let as they used to do ; and oats and Hay are rose high since Christmas; and my law bills have come in heavy. But I have hit upon a way to put a stop to them. For Squire Goldburn and I, happening to travel together in the Flying Coach, settled the matter between us, which will be a great saving of time and money to both parties—pitty we didn't think of it before; but better late than never is an old and a true saying. And I must say Squire Goldburn behaved neighbourly and like a man of sense, who saw his own interest when clearly put before him. So we agreed to end law and make a match of it, and by uniting the

estates hereafter in proper settlements to put an end to all difficulty about the subject of our disputes.

I am to pull down the hedge, he consents to give up the gate, and the old cart way is to be common between us both ; I to be allowed the expence incurred in cutting the new one.

You must come home as soon as you can on receipt of this to be married. Noland is drawing the settlements. You may order wedden clothes and new liveries, if you like it, in London ; for I've my reasuns for not wishing to be shabby on the occasion. Don't forget to jog Simmon's memory about my South Sea stock. Tell Jenkins, if you see him (and he goes up with cattle to Smithfield Fair at this time every year), to send me down the sides of Hampshire bacon as yusual.

You may buy the wedden ring at Wergman's in St. James's Street, and any jim crack you may think proper on the occasion for Miss, not to exceed five pounds for the cost of the same. Say when you'll come. I do herewith inclose a bill for fifty pounds, though I was angry with you, as just cause was, when I begunn this letter. Soe no more at present from your father,

THOS. FAIRLAND.

Northleigh Hall, ended this June 1st, 1720.

The above elegant and fatherly epistle was duly sealed and sent; and about three weeks after, by the then weekly post, Sir Thomas received

the following affectionate and dutiful reply from his son :—

To Sir Thomas Fairland, Bart., &c., these.

Exeter College, Oxon.

Dear Father,—Many thanks for the Bill ; it would, however, have been more worth saying thank you for, if another of the same amount had come along with it. I have no great fancy for marrying ; but I'll do it to oblige you. I never saw old Goldburn's daughter. Hope she's pretty and has some spirit in her. Can she dance, sit a horse well, and leap a gate ? But never mind that ; if she has money, the thing will do very well. That's what we want in the matter. How black the lawyers will look when they find that you and old Goldburn have made it up. I should like to have enjoyed the fun of telling them the news ; that would have been a nut worth cracking. I'll do all in London as you wish, and will only stay there to see the new play at Lincoln's Inn Fields—*The City Wife*—and the great Bear bait about to take place in Tothill fields, and will then come down and be married as soon as you like.

Dear Father,

Your dutiful son,

JOHN FAIRLAND.

We thought it right to give our readers copies of the above epistles, as they are highly characteristic of

both father and son. All was prepared as directed, and in the month of July following on one fine morning early, there was a great stir and bustle at Southmead House. Tables groaned with the preparations for a grand dinner ; friends were arriving from far and near ; tenants were collecting, and the poor were astir ; they were to have a feast. All the fiddles the country round could produce were engaged for a ball in the evening ; and there were to be bride-cakes, and scrambling for the wedding ring in a pail of water, and throwing the stocking, and all the other old English customs on the marriage of Miss Sarah Goldburn with Mr. John Fairland, as agreed upon between their worthy fathers.

It was said that the settlements were duly prepared, and were to have been signed ere the parties set out for church. All this was said ; but whether truly or falsely we cannot at this distance of time possibly determine. Certain it is that one settlement took place on that day which, though final, was little expected, and least of all by the party most concerned in it. This arose from the sudden presence of

a guest by no means welcome, who stepped in uninvited and without more ceremony turned the house of intended joy into one of mourning; exactly reversing what Hamlet says to Horatio, when he declares that the baked meats of his father's funeral did coldly furnish forth his mother's marriage board. For here the good cheer, roast or baked, prepared for the marriage feast, did indeed serve for a funeral one, and for that of no less a person than he at whose cost it had been so amply prepared. To drop all figure, the fact was this: old Mr. Goldburn was found dead in his bed on the very morning he had intended to give away his only daughter in the proposed union with the son of Sir Thomas Fairland.

It is almost unnecessary to say that the wedding could not take place; and during the time appropriated for that mourning which natural affection, decency, and the settlement of the old gentleman's affairs required, some very strange and, as they eventually turned out, very unfortunate circumstances occurred.

Mr. Goldburn had made his will some years before he had any thoughts of marrying his daughter, and

in it, with the exception of a handsome life annuity to his wife, left his only child Sarah sole heiress to all his property, real and personal, and committed her to the hands of a very worthy upright man, Mr. Sheriff (a well-known lawyer in the west of England), as her guardian.

Mr. Sheriff found Mr. Goldburn's affairs not quite so easily settled as he had at first imagined they would be. There were no incumbrances, but time was required to put many matters to rights; and circumstances had lately come to his knowledge in the course of his legal practice which had given him a very complete insight into the concerns of Sir Thomas Fairland. He was convinced that the old baronet's affairs were in a bad plight; that he had completely deceived the late Squire Goldburn; and that his son, who passed with the world for being only wild and thoughtless, was, in fact, very cunning, and a party concerned in the knavish designs of the father. In short, that both father and son had formed a plot to possess themselves, as far as they could do so, of Miss Goldburn's fortune, in order to clear their own embarrassed estates.

Like an honest man and a faithful guardian, Mr. Sheriff did all he could to delay the marriage (to break it off was, of course, out of his power) till he could effect the following object—namely, to put the deceased Mr. Goldburn's affairs in such a state as that the marriage articles should secure the immense fortune of Miss Sarah Goldburn, both in land and money, to her and to her children, or, failing issue, to the Goldburn family hereafter ; giving the husband (whose motives in seeking her hand were those of the most sordid nature) only a life-interest in her property. To effect these most meritorious objects Mr. Sheriff set hard to work ; but in the interval some very annoying circumstances occurred.

Unhappily, the widow of old Mr. Goldburn and mother of Sarah happened to be of the house of Fairland. In fact, she had been a Miss Fairland, and was a younger sister, on the father's side, of Sir Thomas. She, like himself, was born at Northleigh Hall ; and all her thoughts, feelings, and family pride were centred in the grandeur of the resi-

dence, and in the name of Fairland. Her husband, the late Mr. Goldburn, though of very respectable and wealthy parentage, had nevertheless sprung from trade and commerce; hence she held him and his connections very cheap, and on all occasions was ready to sacrifice his interests to those of her own more aristocratic family. She was not without kindness of heart and good intention; but she was a very weak woman—deficient in knowledge of human nature, of strong prejudices, and wholly unsuspecting of the villany and knavery of half mankind. With such a character to work upon, her half-brother and his son were able to defeat the prudent and upright plans of Mr. Sheriff, and to make her the instrument of injuring her own daughter.

They first persuaded her that the young lady's guardian, being a lawyer, never intended to settle the late Mr. Goldburn's affairs, but, by one delay and another, to keep them in his own hands, for his own benefit. Unhappily, they said, by the great power given him by her late husband's will, he could very easily do so, to the serious prejudice or utter

destruction of the young lady's fortune. Almost any steps, they argued, were therefore warrantable to counteract him in such designs. In fine, so artfully did they prevail with the weak and credulous mother, that she actually joined with young Fairland in persuading her daughter to marry him without her guardian's consent—and this she did only a few days after she came of age !

This act of folly done (before Mr. Sheriff could interfere in any way to protect the cruelly deceived young woman, who thus married without any marriage articles), on the very day after the ceremony Sarah had a deed laid before her which she was directed to sign, being told by her husband and his father it was absolutely necessary in order to enable them to take immediate steps in her behalf, and rescue her property from the rapacious hands of her guardian. In an evil hour poor Sarah complied. THE DEED was one of surrender or gift of all her real estates to the husband she had just wedded ; and, as no personal property was secured to her, all the rest became likewise his own in right of his marriage.

Thus, then, the heiress of old Mr. Goldburn, who was the mistress of thousands on the morning she gave her hand at the altar, before the close of the following day became completely dependent on an unprincipled, extravagant, selfish husband, who had used the advantages of a remarkably handsome person and a specious manner to win himself into her favour, and repaid the unlimited confidence this amiable young creature had been led to repose in him by an act of the most ungrateful deliberate villany to her and to her offspring yet unborn. Her mother lived deeply to repent the folly into which she had been drawn, and to know, too late, the honour, probity, and prudence of her daughter's mistrusted and ill-used guardian.

Having narrated these circumstances at large, we shall pass in silence much that is painful, and briefly recount the events of several ensuing years. The marriage so iniquitously brought about proved an unhappy one to both parties. The husband was dissatisfied and tyrannical, for he plainly saw that he did not long retain a place in the affec-

tions of his wife. That wife was at once suffering and patient. Three daughters, Nancy, Diana, and Patty, were the fruit of the marriage. Their father hated them all, and wished for a son ; yet from no motive of tenderness, only because a man of an old family with a good estate ought to have a son ; it was usual, a thing looked for, and it ought to be.

The least remarkable events, and, indeed, the least painful, because they were not contrary to nature, that we have to record during this period, are the deaths of the mother of the unhappy wife and of old Sir Thomas Fairland. After a long and very suffering illness, the latter at last died suddenly, even whilst giving instructions to his son how to get the highest interest from a widow surrounded with a numerous offspring, whose necessities had driven her to have recourse to the ruinous system of mortgaging in order to meet some pressing claims on account of her late husband's debts.

His son dutifully attended his death-bed, and reverently observed his father's instructions, particularly those about the mortgage. He saw the old gentle-

man breathe his last; and his man-servant, Tom Wakeum, who stood behind him, said very civilly, as he turned away from the corpse, 'Sir, you are now Sir John Fairland; but, nevertheless, I'm sorry for you, sir, that old master is gone. And, dear me! to think that he should die just before Lady-day! He was always asking, in his illness, how soon it would come; thinking, no doubt, of the rents and the tenants. I'm sorry for you, sir, that your father is gone.'

'And yet, Tom,' said the new baronet, with solemn composure, 'you know the saying: It is better to have a fat sorrow than a lean one. All the Fairland property comes clear now since my marriage. Send for Shroud, the undertaker, and let every possible respect be paid to my father's memory in the funeral. Bury in lead, Tom; hearse, horses, escutcheons, and black plumes.'

So saying, the son closed the bed-curtains on the dead, and retired to his deceased father's closet. What were his contemplations there on the late scene nobody knew. But the nurse who passed the

door, hearing a slight noise within the room, and being very curious, listened at the keyhole, and said that she heard distinctly a rumpling like the turning over of parchments and papers.

A few days after, a pompous funeral train bore the mortal remains of old Sir Thomas Fairland to their last resting-place in the parish church. A still more pompous epitaph, engraved on an enormous slab of white marble, standing more than fifteen feet high, on the walls of the church, with a full-cheeked cherub at each corner, blowing a trumpet, recorded his birth, his ancient family, and all his grand connections ; his having served twice in Parliament and once as sheriff of the county ; his many virtues, real and imaginary, were not forgotten ; his strict integrity was set forth ; and, as a last item of the account, the tablet stated he had been a liberal benefactor to the poor. This was a mistake ; it should have said to the lawyers.

We have before stated that Sarah (whom we must henceforth call Lady Fairland) was not happy in her married life. As time glided on, experience taught

her to reflect justly on the past. She was scarcely surprised at the melancholy result of the connection she had formed in so rash and imprudent a manner. Too late did she find that, in seeking to win her youthful heart, Sir John Fairland had been more studious to please than to benefit her ; and that in respect to advantage he had looked only to his own. But, whatever may have been her disappointment, she had of late years kept it much within her own bosom. Well did she know that in a married life there is little dignity in complaint, and that in censuring a husband a woman in some measure reflects upon herself. She was also aware that none but the great events of life are those which arrest the eye of the world. So long as a wife keeps her station, without experiencing any violent ill-treatment or glaring deprivation of her rights, those feelings of tenderness wounded by the cold neglect, the slights, or the daily unkindness of a husband in minor things, that render her most unhappy, meet with no sympathy from others. The common order of men and women are wholly devoid of those finer feelings which constitute

the principal source of happiness or misery with the delicate and susceptible in mind. What, therefore, is injury, insult, and even agony to the latter, would be little understood by the former, or, if known, would be treated by them only as themes for laughter and contempt.

Our readers will not be surprised to learn that on the death of her mother (which occurred within six weeks after that of her father-in-law) Lady Fairland found herself ill, low-spirited, lonely, and incapable of taking the active part she could have wished in the care of her family and children. A very poor but beloved cousin (for whom she had always intended to provide had she retained power over her own fortune), who lived with her some years as a companion, a friend, and a sister, had lately married a young curate, and consequently left her. The newly-made baronet was always out, either hunting, shooting, or feasting with his boisterous and not very reputable associates, and some said that he was often found in worse company; and as he had either quarrelled with or given offence to all his most

respectable neighbours of his own rank and standing, very little company resorted to the house. To assist her in her family cares, and somewhat to relieve her loneliness, Lady Fairland sought for what was then far more common for married ladies to seek than it is at the present time—a female companion.

One was soon found, a gentlewoman about twenty-one years old, well-looking, of more information than such persons generally possess, insinuating in her address, a shrewd observer, with a fluent and plausible tongue, not at all scrupulous in any matter where her own interests were concerned, and, as it too soon proved, profoundly artful. Sir John Fairland could not have had a worse companion for his wife than Miss Ellen Gilbard; such was her name. Lady Fairland, of an open, kind, and unsuspecting nature, was but too easy a prey for artifice or cunning; whilst for Sir John the companion was a far more dangerous associate, since he had none of the armour of proof that high principle becomes to a man in the familiar society of a woman who has the power to please and the will to corrupt.

Her first care was to gain a footing with Lady Fairland ; and by being active, useful, and much disposed to save her all trouble or exertion (an indolent temper was her ladyship's principal, if not only, fault), she soon found herself in a position not to be dismissed without great inconvenience to Lady Fairland, who could not do without her. This object gained ('fast seated in her saddle,' as Tom Wakeum used to say when he talked of Miss Gilbard), she next turned her attention to the baronet, and opened a masked battery upon him without further delay.

What first prompted her to do so we cannot say ; possibly it might arise from the love of intrigue, which is as meat and drink to some persons, necessary to keep them alive ; or possibly her hawk's eye detected that Sir John Fairland was more than indifferent towards his wife, and that Lady Fairland's constitution was gradually giving way under the slow but sure effects of bitter disappointment and secret sorrow. Possibly, if Lady Fairland died, she, Miss Ellen Gilbard, who had perfect confidence in the strength of her own bodily constitution, and no

less in that of her woman's wit, might step into her place and herself become Lady Fairland. Who could say it should not be so? Many no better than she was had married the widowed husbands of the women to whom they had originally been companions; and as for her person and address!—a look in the glass, and a very free and unembarrassed chit-chat which she held with the baronet on the very afternoon of the day these thoughts first engaged her attention, soon satisfied her that she had nothing to fear.

When persons accustomed to plot and intrigue once fix on a point to attack it they never rest till it is carried, more especially where a motive of paramount self-interest leads them on. Even so was it now. Every whim, every little caprice of Sir John was studied by Miss Ellen, in order to accommodate herself to his humour, his ease, his complacency; whilst her uncommon talent for amusing and furnishing subjects for amusement was a perpetual source of relief to him from what he had hitherto detested—his own fire-side, and the tedium of wet days and unemployed

hours in the country. All this Miss Ellen saw, and she played on his feelings to bring them into harmony with her own. She understood the key-note by which they were governed, and never touched them with a discord. The perpetual sunshine of Miss Ellen's temper towards him, with her unwearied efforts to please, formed, in his prejudiced view, a striking contrast to the manner and the conduct of his unfortunate wife.

Lady Fairland could not conceal her unhappiness, and that she considered herself a most ill-used woman. To her repeated remonstrances that he ought in honour and in justice to make a settlement on her and on her children (knowing in what way he had possessed himself of all her fortune), he would not only turn a deaf ear, but in his hours of ill humour would often threaten, as he had no son, to leave whatever he possessed to strangers ; or else he would cut short her supplications and suddenly quit the room with the most harsh and unmerited reproaches on his lips.

The repetition of these injuries at last so wore her

feelings and irritated her wounded spirit, that she became peevish, at times even fretful, in her manner towards Sir John ; and being powerless in those great matters in which he refused her all justice, she grew somewhat obdurate in little things, and in the hope to move him, for the sake of her dear girls hereafter, had recourse to the worst of all expedients—teazing him by constant reproach and petty opposition.

Great was the excuse for her conduct, for great had been its provocation ; but it was unwise in the extreme. By so acting she laid herself open to the attack of the serpent she had fostered in her bosom ; and when she would indignantly have shaken it off, before it inflicted the most deadly wound, she had no longer the power to do so. Not only did Miss Ellen Gilbard refuse to quit Lady Fairland's service, though engaged solely as her companion, but Sir John threatened his wife that if she sent away the only person who made his home pleasurable to him, he would turn her and her children out of doors.

Stung to the very soul by these indignities, in the passionate bitterness of her feelings Lady Fairland

demanded a separation, and Sir John did not object to it. Lawyer Noland was ordered to draw the necessary articles. The day was fixed for their signature and the departure of the much-injured wife from her home. But these are events that require another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

Ah ! then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And gathering tears and tremblings of distress,
And cheeks all pale which but an hour ago
Blush'd at the praise of their own loveliness.
And there were sudden partings, such as press
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs
Which ne'er might be repeated ; who could guess
If ever more should meet those mutual eyes,
Since upon nights so sweet such awful morn could rise.

Byron.

ON the day appointed for the signing of the articles of separation a very striking scene was presented in the fine old hall of Northleigh. We would we could give it to the reader as distinctly as it is impressed on our own mind's eye ; but words have less power than the pencil in sketches of such a nature. We will, however, do our best to afford some faint idea of its interest.

The hall, large and gloomy, was of other and far

distant days. The vaulted oak roof, the carved finials and corbels, looked dark with age and the smoke of many generations. The narrow arched windows, set with small diamond panes of glass, were so overshadowed by some lofty elms which grew close without, that even on the brightest summer day the sun's rays never found their way through them, except here and there in a few luminous spots which played upon and chequered the stone pavement beneath. A huge old chimney (wide enough to hold eight or ten persons within its ample sides when the winter logs blazed merrily on the hearth), with a large ornamental front, having the family arms cut deep into the granite of which it was composed, stood opposite the windows. Several doors opened into the hall, and the largest led from it to the court before the house.

Many a picture hung around ; many a portrait of the Elizabethan and James I. fashion. Though some of these Fairlands were of high note in their day, they were now only remembered by those pale and time-worn records of their features, or by tablets and

brasses in the church, which told how sons and daughters of earth, once the inheritors of knightly honours and great possessions, had passed away to sleep with the meanest, till the last dread day of the universal account.

Sceptre and crown must tumble down,
And in the earth be equal laid
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Here also were seen worthies of the time of Charles I., with steel breast-plate, buff, and bando-leer. As of the reign of William and Mary, and Queen Anne, with full-bottomed wigs and high toupée, down to the no less disguised beaux and belles of the *then* present time. The former in gold-laced coats and cut velvet waistcoats, three-cornered hats in their hands and nosegays in their button-holes, simpering and smiling *vis-à-vis* to the fair dames in sacks, and hoops, and lappets, with all the grace that numberless little black patches, then called sparks, could add to the natural beauties of their complexions. Some tapestry, though sadly faded and worn, still covered the lower portions of the walls; and a very

large old table, with several oak chairs, stood in the centre of the apartment.

At the head of that table sat a grave-looking man dressed in a snuff-coloured suit, his buckles large and of silver, and his shoes brushed to the brightness of ebony. He had a brow that denoted thought, features of a grave and fixed—a set character is the better term ; they looked as if nothing could move them from their business-like expression ; as if they belonged to a man with whom all the events and circumstances of life passed as matters of rule and order, subject to set forms and determined laws ; with whom whatever was spontaneous could have no place, and who, by his own consent, would as soon be carried away bodily by a whirlwind or a hurricane as by any possible outbreak of his own passions or feelings.

There he sat, the very model of order, with the ink-horn then generally worn by gentlemen of the law hanging from his button-hole, a pen ready cut and nibbed by his side, and his grandfather's great seal ring upon the thumb of his right hand. He sat with

the open parchments before him, quite prepared for business, only waiting the word.

A very different-looking man leaned with his elbows against the granite slab of the chimney-piece, and his back somewhat turned to the lawyer. He was richly though carelessly dressed in a scarlet coat and waistcoat deeply trimmed with gold lace ; the waistcoat was buttoned in the wrong holes, and the blue stockings hung loose about his ankles. There was a pale and haggard look in his countenance ; he seemed neither satisfied with the world nor with himself ; his brows were knit, his air disconsolate ; yet his features, though wearing so unhappy an expression, were still handsome. His dark eye often settled on the ground ; he stole a hasty and anxious glance towards one of the doors which opened into the hall from the interior of the house ; he seemed to watch it with intense pain, and shrank and shuddered when it moved. He turned, however, his head abruptly away and looked down again upon the ground, but without altering his position, when, on the opening of the door, three lovely children came into the hall.

The eldest, Nancy, was a very fine-grown girl of nearly nine years old, with dark eyes, a rich brown gipsy complexion, and glowing lips and cheeks. The second girl was altogether different, being of a larger make, a noble air, and, though so young, with something commanding in her step and demeanour; she might have sat for the portrait of an infant Juno. Her features were perfectly formed, the complexion of excessive fairness, though tinged with the deepest blush of the rose, and her hair was as bright and as rich as gold. She bore the name of a goddess; but it was Diana.

The third child, Patty, scarcely twenty months old, was still in her nurse's arms. These children, and the maid-servant who conducted them, kept somewhat back in the hall. They looked grave, and were perfectly silent, as if they were brought there for some serious purpose, like going to school, though they could not exactly tell for what. The servant looked afraid; the only unembarrassed and unconcerned living creature there present was the child in its nurse's arms, who smiled and looked

about, and sucked her coral, or put her fingers in her mouth, with the most perfect satisfaction.

A groom was seen without the hall-door, holding a horse richly caparisoned, with a red velvet side-saddle and silver mountings: his own horse, also, was equipped for starting. Two or three gentlemen were present in the hall; but they kept together in a small knot, somewhat apart from the table. No one spoke; not even the entrance of the children caused the utterance of a word.

At length the portentous door again moved; again did the leaning figure give a hurried glance, and, shuddering as it opened, said in a low hollow tone, as he turned towards the lawyer, 'Noland, she is come.'

'Yes, Sir John Fairland, I am come, and shall soon be gone from your presence and from this house for ever,' said Lady Fairland, as she entered, and with a slow, decisive, and majestic air walked into the very centre of the hall. All eyes were turned upon her. She was still lovely, though in pensive beauty, and wearing in her countenance that

peculiar look, that delicate white, with a scarcely natural tinge of bright red, often giving place to an ashy paleness, which marks the future victims of consumption even before there are any actual symptoms of the disease.

Such was Lady Fairland. She was tall and of a stately carriage; her dress, a riding one of the day, was of the highest fashion: a dark maroon-coloured habit and a white satin waistcoat, both rich with gold lace, the finest Flanders lace cravat, a white beaver hat with a long plume, drooping over the shoulder as low as the waist.

On reaching the middle of the hall (no one had presence of mind enough to offer her a chair) she stood quite still; and seeing the sullen silence and the inflexible look and manner which Sir John Fairland maintained towards her, she cast on him a proud and indignant glance, as her bosom seemed to swell, and her attitude to become more firm and rigid from the strength of her irritated feelings. A pleased and gentle note, if we may use the word, like the cry of a nestling at the coming of the parent bird,

caught her ear, as it issued from the lips of the infant in the arms of the nurse at the sight of the mother.

Lady Fairland turned to the child. It stretched forth its little arms towards her, as if to invite her embrace. She could resist no longer ; all the mother rose at once in her soul ; she rushed forward, snatched the child from the servant, strained it to her bosom with a feeling of agony, and burst into a flood of tears as she said in a tone that pierced every ear and touched every heart, ‘Oh, my poor babe, my dear children, how can I bear to go away, to part from you !’

The two elder girls, seeing the tears, the passionate sorrow of their mother, and hearing her talk of going away, went up to and clung around her, and weeping bitterly for sympathy, yet not exactly knowing why they wept, asked her what was the matter, and why she talked of going away.

Lady Fairland kissed each with the warmest affection, but made no reply to their fond enquiries, and once more restoring the infant to the nurse’s arms,

wiped the big drops that still coursed each other down her own cheeks, and made a strong effort to check her tears, and to recover her self-possession. She had a firm mind with all a woman's tenderness of heart, and now feeling herself equal to the task, prepared with a calm and dignified composure to complete it, and to go through the painful and necessary duty of the day.

She approached the table. Mr. Noland rose mechanically, for though incapable of being easily moved to anything like sympathy or feeling, he was awed by her presence and deportment: he felt at the moment that a noble spirit, maintaining its native simplicity and its sense of self-respect under the most trying circumstances, carries with it a force stronger than all forms and statutes. The moral law asserted its own rights, and the native majesty of truth acted upon him with an ascendancy which none but the dull in head and the hard in heart could resist.

Noland could not. He offered the pen to Lady Fairland to sign the deed of separation, scarcely

knowing what he did—for the husband ought to have first signed it—but as he did so he gave an appealing look at that husband, and pronounced with strong emphasis the words ‘Sir John Fairland!’—as if, in thus suddenly and emphatically addressing him, he would say, ‘Can you thus let such a wife leave you and your children for ever?’

Sir John raised his head, like a man awakened out of sleep, scarcely conscious of what he saw or heard; as if still under the influence of some dream that had possessed his mind with images of doubt and terror. He looked first at the lawyer, then at his wife, and with a bitter glance at the children; but he neither moved nor spoke; he was deadly pale.

Lady Fairland for a moment occupied the chair which Noland had vacated, took the pen, signed her name with the firmest hand and the utmost deliberation, and then, not daring to trust herself with another tender adieu to the children, purposely turned from them, as she made some steps in advance towards the hall-door, where the horses were waiting for her without. Still she lingered, moved another step or

two, and again paused. Those who closely observed her thought they could detect the outward marks of an inward struggle : a wish to say something more, and yet an embarrassment, a feeling that made her reluctant to speak out ; and she hesitated as she at length said the words, ' Before I go '—then stopped—a deep blush overspread her pale cheeks, and rose even to her temples, as she murmured, ' It must be spoken ; I will not shrink from the task ;' and turning directly towards her husband, she resumed her natural dignity of manner and deportment and thus addressed him :

' Sir John Fairland, there is one question which I must ask you before I quit your presence and your roof for ever. I ask it before these gentlemen here assembled to witness our separation. Have you, Sir John, any charge to make against my character since I have been your wife ?'

' None, Madam,' replied Sir John, in a calm and serious tone, and without the slightest hesitation.

' Well, then, sir,' she continued, ' painful to me as the subject is to mention in this company, yet

it is due to my own honour that it should not be concealed. Sir John, I must tell you before all here assembled that I am again likely to become a mother. Do not defame me when I am gone; this is all I ask of you for myself. Be kind to my children, be a father to our dear girls, when I am far away; and may God forgive you as fully as I do all your past unkindness to me.'

Tears rose in her eyes; she dashed them indignantly off, as if vexed at her own weakness, waved her hand, and turned to depart. But ere she could reach the door Sir John Fairland sprang forward, rushed between her and it, threw his arms round her neck, burst into an agony of grief that seemed to shake every nerve in his strong and manly frame, as he exclaimed, 'Stay, Sarah!—do not go. Let it not be said that a child of mine was born out of his father's house! Perhaps it may be a boy, and all may yet be well.'

Lady Fairland made no answer; she stood irresolute, neither returning nor yet offering to go forward. The two eldest girls came up to her, took her hands

in theirs, and, crying, said, 'Don't go away, mamma; stay with papa and us. O! don't go away!'

The gentlemen present gathered round and ventured, though with some fear, to add their request that Lady Fairland would not leave her family and her home, but stay at the entreaty of her husband and children. Still she lingered irresolute.

Lawyer Noland walked a turn or two about the hall. He did not join the group of sorrowing and entreating friends; but he paused, took a pinch of snuff, and considered for a minute or so, as he was wont to do when about to give an opinion on a knotty point in law. He next took off his spectacles, rubbed the glasses, put them in their shagreen silver-mounted case, and proceeded to rub his own eyes as he had done his glasses—they had certainly been moistened by a tear. His next movement was towards the nurse-maid. Without saying a word he took the infant gently from her, and carried it, not at all awkwardly, across the hall, and there, taking Lady Fairland by surprise, offered the child at once to her arms. She could not let it drop on the ground; she

accepted the precious charge, as he said, 'Madam, no woman can leave her infant when entreated to stay and take care of it; Lady Fairland least of all, for she is the tenderest of mothers.'

The methodical attorney, having left the child in such good hands, next walked deliberately towards the table, and with the utmost coolness cancelled the whole proceedings by throwing the articles of separation into the fire that was burning on the silver-headed dogs. 'Sir John,' he said, addressing the astonished baronet, 'Sir John, I shall not make any charge for them. No successful termination of an appeal in any court of law ever gave me so much joy as that which has this day resulted from mine to Lady Fairland. Be a wise and a good husband henceforth, and may God bless you both.'

Great indeed was the joy of that day's reconciliation; the children were made happy, the servants had a butt of ale broached to drink health and long life to their master and mistress. Mr. Noland took more punch than he ever took before or after, for the same honest purpose; even Sir John was

for once in his life, happy ; and Lady Fairland, though pensive, was greatly touched and softened by the events of the day ; whilst Miss Ellen Gilbard observed a decorous and a well-pleased manner. For a little while all went on well, even till the time when Lady Fairland was delivered of a son. The babe was pronounced by the nurses and the gossips to be the finest child that ever was born, and as like his father as one pea to another.

By the desire of his mother, Mr. Noland was requested to stand godfather. The boy was named Charles after him and John after his father, and the bells of seven neighbouring parishes rang out their merry peals for the joy of his birth.

CHAPTER III.

Thrift, thrift, Horatio ! the funeral bak'd meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

Shakespeare.

ALTHOUGH Lady Fairland did well in her confinement, it was the opinion of her old and most skilful medical attendant that she carried in her bosom the seeds of consumption, which in all probability would spring up, and terminate in an early death. Though sickly, she lived, however, much longer than the doctors anticipated, even to see her son attain his eighth year, and to experience a renewal of those unkindnesses on the part of her husband which she now accustomed herself to bear with a patient and resigned spirit. Her love for her children was great, and she desired to live, if it might be God's will to spare her, for their sakes, feeling assured that

when she was gone theirs would be a neglected and a melancholy lot.

Had the feelings of Sir John Fairland been less capricious towards his wife, both might have been happy. But as not even right feelings can remain such unless based on right principles, and on that constancy which is not to be shaken by every wind, he soon showed a fluctuating and changeable disposition towards her; and she too soon saw that in the moment of his awakened fears, when he prevented her leaving him for ever, he had made a false estimate of his own heart, and had mistaken the outbreak of passion for a settled affection.

Yet, though Miss Ellen Gilbard still maintained her station at Northleigh Hall, as the chosen favourite of its master, and was often assuming, negligent, or pert to its mistress, there were times when Sir John, especially if in a good humour, let her see that he had not lost all regard and consideration for the mother of his children; whilst in his deportment to her as his wife, in the face of the world, he preserved a very decent bearing—and was

neither slighting nor disrespectful. In the view of the public, therefore (the public, who generally form their opinion from the surface of things, and who neither pause to examine closely nor to reflect deeply), he passed for a very good husband, and Lady Fairland for a very happy wife, and Miss Ellen Gilbard for a treasure to the whole family.

Another misery scarcely less hard or trying to bear than the liaison between her husband and her companion arose from his indulgence in an arbitrary violent temper. There are men who obtain a sort of privilege and ascendancy in their vices, of which it is very difficult to say how it is gained, unless by the most selfish indulgence on the one hand, and by the mere habit of submission on the other. Be this as it may, Lady Fairland's life was one of constant care and suffering. But passing in silence those numberless little circumstances and feelings which, as they preponderate for good or evil, make up in the aggregate the happiness or misery of domestic life, we proceed at once to the next prominent event of our story, the last illness of Lady Fairland.

Her dear boy had passed his eighth birthday; he was a beautiful, gifted, and most affectionate child, with an intelligence and feeling far beyond his years. Indeed, so acute was his sensibility that Lady Fairland felt very anxious about his future peace. The lad was most fondly attached to his mother; and though so young, from his natural shrewdness, he could detect that his father was often cross to her, and that Miss Ellen Gilbard was not kind. Lady Fairland daily found herself growing weaker and weaker; and scarcely knowing where to turn for a friend (so completely had her husband and her companion kept away from her all persons they disliked and surrounded her with their own creatures), in the very despair of her situation she had recourse to one who, in our days, would have been held as of a grade far too inferior to be associated with the wife of a baronet.

But in those days it was different. Adverse circumstances, poverty and lowly station, even when engaged in a very humble way of life, were not considered such impassable barriers to social inter-

course as they have become in more recent times. Persons did not then remember to forget their old connections, or endeavour to conceal the existence of a near relative or a once loved and valued friend as a subject of discredit to themselves or their more proud and dignified kindred, because that friend was in trade. Lady Fairland was not only free from this folly, but from the weakness of head and the unsoundness of heart which it is to be feared it too often indicates. She had a relative, a very humble one, whom she tenderly loved and esteemed. It was to her she now turned in the great anxiety she felt for the future welfare of her children.

We mentioned, in a former chapter, that there was a poor cousin who, in the early years of her marriage, lived as a companion with Lady Fairland, and left her to marry a young curate as poor almost as herself. He died, leaving her, with two infants, destitute of all provision. In the extremity of her distress, the Widow Morton—such was her name—found a patron in a then fashionable dressmaker, who had the business of all the great ladies in the

county, and who charitably gave the poor curate's widow, as she was clever in ornamental fancies and embroidery, work enough, well paid, to keep herself and her children from starving. Some time after, on the death of her employer, she succeeded to the business, and by the blessing of God on the exertions of the widow and the fatherless she prospered.

At no period of her own past distresses had Lady Fairland ever forgotten her poor cousin Morton ; and had she been the mistress of her own fortune, she would have done something more for her and her babes than employ her to make or ornament her dresses and her children's frocks. But the allowance she received from Sir John was most disproportionate to the fortune she had brought him, and the greater part of that scanty allowance she devoted to deeds of charity in the parish. A devotional spirit, acts of mercy and benevolence, and her care and love for her children, were the best, indeed the only consolations she had found in her sad and neglected life.

It was to Mrs. Morton she now turned, and

implored her, when she herself should be no more, to keep an eye on these children, and if ever they needed it to aid them by her advice, or by any other kindness, and that she would on any anxious emergency interfere in their behalf. She also assured her poor cousin, with the most perfect sincerity, that she had the fullest confidence in her good sense, her integrity, and her fearlessness in upholding a righteous cause.

Mrs. Morton was much affected by Lady Fairland's expressions of esteem and regard, and though, as she candidly told her, from her humble station in life, she could not hope to do much in any attempt to serve the children of such a man as Sir John Fairland, yet she would never forget the request of their dear mother, and if ever an opportunity occurred in which she could be useful it should not be lost. With these assurances she took an affectionate leave of her suffering friend, and never saw her after.

Lady Fairland sank rapidly under her disorder.

When Sir John saw her danger, and that there was no hope, he began to learn the value of the wife he had hitherto so neglected; and, as if his tardy and unavailing affection could arrest the progress of death, he now paid her every possible attention. He could not lengthen her days, but he certainly soothed those which remained to her.

During the last fortnight of her illness she had many interviews with her husband. What passed was never known, though he was often much moved, even to tears, on quitting her apartment. Mrs. Morton, however, and even the children themselves, well knew the feelings of Lady Fairland; and there cannot be a doubt that she had recommended them in the most earnest manner to the care of their father. Probably she had obtained a promise that he would so order his affairs as, in case of his death, not only to provide for his children, but to leave them under the charge of proper guardians. The last act of Lady Fairland's life was one of charity; though the story is very simple, it may be told.

There was a poor woman in the neighbourhood,

whose husband, idle and unthrifty, had deserted, and left her and her helpless little ones in great distress. Ill as she was, Lady Fairland ordered everything necessary for their immediate relief, and directed that Tom Wakeum should forthwith set out on a horse laden with the supplies. On hearing the trampling of the horse in the court below, she requested to be raised from her bed, and placed in an easy chair near the window, that she might have the satisfaction of seeing Tom depart on the last act of Christian charity it would ever be her lot to perform. Her wish was complied with ; and as her two eldest daughters were arranging the pillows in her chair, Sir John came into the room. He expressed his surprise to see her up, knowing how ill she was, and so near her end. Nancy told him what had been her mother's orders.

‘Thank God,’ said Lady Fairland, ‘that poor woman and her children will now be saved. When I am gone remember her ; for think what are the anxieties of a mother for her offspring !’ She pressed her hands together, and looked earnestly in the face

of her husband as she added, 'My own heart tells me. By it I have learnt to know what must be those of that poor distressed woman. O ! Sir John Fairland, you will remember your promise to me. Let not the prayer of a dying wife be made to you in vain. Bless your children with a father's love. And you, my children, love and be obedient to your father, and the promise of blessing to those who honour their earthly parents shall be yours. For myself, I die in peace with all the world, praying God to be forgiven, even as I forgive.'

She looked up imploringly as she spoke these last words, took the hand of her husband and pressed it to her lips, and then, placing her feeble hands on the heads of her daughters, and solemnly pronouncing a blessing on each as they kneeled at her feet, she kissed them tenderly, and, wearied with the efforts she had made, sank back in her chair.

Sir John Fairland was deeply affected ; he pressed his lips on her pale forehead and cheeks, and repeatedly said in the most agitated manner, 'Sarah, forgive me ; I hate myself ; forgive me, Sarah. I will

love the children ; I am not the hard-hearted wretch you take me for ; I will love them. But what will they do, what shall we all do, without you ?'

Again and again did he renew these assurances of feeling and affection ; and when Lady Fairland fell back in her chair in a fainting fit, from which she was never more restored to life and sense, his distress at the death of the woman he had so injured, and who in the midst of all truly loved him, was so great that he gave himself up to a paroxysm of the most violent sorrow.

Sir John was taken almost by force from the chamber of death, and seemed for some days to find no possible source of consolation but in ordering the most expensive funeral that could be devised, and in having the children with him, caressing and ordering everything for them ; such being the first proofs of the fatherly care he bestowed upon them in compliance with his promise to their mother.

We shall not pause to give an account of the funeral pomp ; the most touching part of the ceremony was that which was unhired ; for the tenants of

Sir John and the poor of the neighbourhood, who had so much cause to revere and love their late benefactress, of their own accord assembled and formed themselves into a little procession of mourners, following the remains of Lady Fairland from her late residence to the parish church.

Sir John felt so much the loss he had sustained that for a while not even Miss Ellen Gilbard dared venture upon the least attempt at consolation beyond such sympathy as might be expressed by her deep and fashionable mourning, a very long face, and a most solemn demeanour. Had she behaved otherwise, or had she attempted to resume the reins of domestic government during the season of those first and salutary impressions of honest sorrow in the mind of Sir John, she felt assured he would at once have turned her out of doors. But she knew her man, and patiently bided her time. She knew that the human mind, like the tide, has its ebblings and flowings, and that she must wait for the turning of it ere she could once more endeavour to float her own bark of adventure on its cruise of good-fortune.

She did not wait long ; for violent as had been the grief of Sir John Fairland, it was but the sorrow of a man ; and what is man ? So inconstant, so changing, so ready to forget, and to return to his old follies or old sins, so prone to form new ties and new connections, that we question whether, at the expiration of six months, Sir John would have desired, had it been possible, that the wife whose loss he had so deeply regretted should be restored to him. We question, also, whether he did not at the end of that brief space think that all was for the best, and that in Lady Fairland and her frequent reproaches about his misappropriation of her fortune an obstacle to his peace was now happily removed. Be this as it may, certain it is that at the end of six months he one day remarked to Mr. Noland, who came on a matter of business to the hall, ‘I think that Miss Ellen Gilbard has the handsomest foot and the best-turned ankle I ever saw in all my life. She is a very fine woman, too, for thirty-five ; she does not look more than five-and-twenty.’

Mr. Noland answered only with an emphatic

‘Hem,’ and immediately after enquired concerning the health of Sir John’s children, noticing how much he thought the eldest girl grew like her late lovely mother, both in the beauty of her person and the sweetness of her temper.

‘Do you think so, Noland?’ was all the reply that could be drawn from the baronet, and that was spoken in a tone of the utmost indifference; and then he at once turned the discourse into another channel, and asked Noland (whom he knew to be, like himself, a thorough Jacobite) if there was any good news from over the water, and how the people of Exeter were disposed towards the Hanoverian king, and if there was any reasonable hope of giving him a seat something lower than the throne.

Mr. Noland was at the moment too much interested by the glimpse he had obtained of the politics and intrigues that were going on at Northleigh Hall to think much about those of St. Germain’s or St. James’s, or about the contests of King George and the Pretender. And seeing he could render no service just now for the children of Sir John, he bade him

suddenly a good morning, and left him to his own infatuated counsels and fancies.

The work of folly on the one hand and artifice on the other was soon completed. We feel too much disgust at this part of our story to dwell on particulars ; we shall, therefore, hurry it over as briefly as possible.

Exactly two months after Sir John Fairland had communicated to his attorney the important discovery he had made, that Miss Ellen Gilbard's foot and ankle were such models of grace and beauty, and that a fat woman of thirty-five, fashionably dressed and well rouged, might pass for one of five-and-twenty, he, having full power to make 'any Joan a lady,' conferred that honour on his late wife's housekeeper and companion, and suffered her to assume an unlimited and tyrannical sway over his house, his household, his children, and himself.

How it happened that a man who had turned a deaf ear to all the remonstrances by which a beautiful and noble-minded woman strove to gain merely justice for herself and children, should now surrender

himself up to be ruled and *henpecked* (as Tom Wakeum used to call it) by a woman infinitely her inferior in person, mind, and character, and who brought him nothing but a string of pauper relatives to batten on his means—how all this happened we cannot pretend to explain. Folly, art, infatuation, might each have done something, and habit more. But our own opinion is, that, as the old epitaph expresses it on the tomb of the Devonshire knight,* who slew another and afterwards fell on his own sword, it was of *Righteous Heaven the Retribution Just*. Most just that the woman whom Sir John Fairland had suffered to become the persecutor of his amiable wife, and the prime mover of all his injustice to his children, should now make him pay the penalty of his offences by sitting down by his side the domestic tyrant and ‘she-wolf’ of all his days to come. She had also the advantage of a much stronger mind than Sir John possessed. The ascendancy of a strong mind where there is no restraining principle, when brought into close contact

* Sir John Fitz, of Fitzford.

with a weak one, is almost invariably irresistible. History and biography are full of such examples ; and never was there a more fearful one among the stories of private life than that which we have undertaken to record.

We pass in silence all the wily steps, the petty innovations, the serpent-like windings, or the bold springs made by this woman in her determination to gain power ; we go at once to her great acts of tyranny, and to the passive resistance of the unhappy man she had so completely won and subdued to her purpose.

One wet and wretched morning, when (as Tom Wakeum said in commenting on the circumstance many years after its occurrence) it was too bad to turn out the dogs, that worthy was ordered to drive in an old shabby coach, drawn by the two worst horses in the stable, and in most homely trim, the three daughters and the son of Sir John Fairland (the boy not ten years old) from their father's hall and their birthplace to an old, ill-conditioned, ill-furnished house of Sir John's about three miles distant from

Northleigh, to which the stepmother had decreed their banishment. She alleged that she could not live with them, as she had found them already disposed to be disobedient and insolent to her. An old manservant and a woman, both in the pay and the interests of the new Lady Fairland, were appointed as their sole attendants ; indeed, they had nothing superfluous.

All the neighbourhood was astonished and cried 'Shame ;' but it was of no consequence. At first Sir John drove nearly every day to see them, then his visits were reduced to twice a week, then once a week, till, tired out with the sight of his children's unhappiness on the one hand, and the perpetual worry and quarrelling these poor creatures were made the subject of by his wife on the other, Sir John reduced his visits to once a month, and finally gave them up altogether.

The first Lady Fairland had brought to Northleigh Hall immense riches in her personal effects, such as plate, jewels, tapestry, damasks, and a wardrobe of silks, fine laces, and clothes. But the step-dame

suffered none of these things to find their way to the children, who were allowed only the very plainest and meanest attire.

The sending off the young people was not the only remove from Northleigh Hall: the old and faithful housekeeper and every servant who would not submit to the arbitrary rule of the new mistress were paid and turned out of doors. Only Tom Wakeum stayed and defied her, though with just sufficient civility not to irritate her ill-humour beyond all bounds. He was his master's long-tried, rough, but faithful servant; neither with him nor with the equally rough water-dog Jowler dared she meddle.

Now and then, at his own entreaty, she indulged Sir John with inviting his terrified children to spend a day at the hall; but on these occasions the family quarrels were so great that the visits were at last given up.

In the course of two years after her marriage, Lady Fairland became the mother of two children, a boy and a girl, to whom the names of Abraham and Elizabeth were given. It was soon apparent that

the children of the former marriage were to be entirely neglected and forgotten in the delight experienced on account of the second family.

Not many weeks after Sir John had altogether ceased seeing his children in the old house, an event occurred which, in the end, was productive of very memorable consequences. It was the well-known custom of the baronet, who was an early riser, to take his walk, on the mornings he did not go out hunting, in a meadow that lay at the back of a small wood near his own mansion. A seat under a very aged and spreading elm stood not far from the entrance of the field, and there he would repose himself, from time to time, during his walk.

On the morning of which we are now speaking he was somewhat surprised by seeing a woman, who had a small bundle by her side, seated under the elm. The place and the hour were unusual for such a visitant, and Sir John paused a moment ere he advanced.

The woman rose, and on her turning towards him, to his great surprise, he recognised in the intruder on his

privacy the humble friend and poor cousin of his first wife. He knew that in former times Mrs. Morton had been ardently attached to the deceased Lady Fairland ; and though in the family disputes which she had frequently witnessed she had never in any way leaned towards Sir John Fairland in his exertion of arbitrary power, yet she had never quarrelled with him. Sir John, though he did not like her, had always felt for her a degree of involuntary respect ; she was, as he knew, through having of necessity often been brought into close contact with her when in the early years of his first marriage she lived under his own roof, a good, well-principled woman. She left it only to marry the poor curate whose death had made her penniless. In those years she had been a sort of restraint upon Sir John. She had made him feel uncomfortable in her presence ; her uprightness, her great spirit in the defence of whatever was true, just, and honest, had often crossed his temper and his will. She became disagreeable to him, and since the new rule of things came in at Northleigh Hall, Mrs. Morton kept aloof from it altogether.

He thought it very strange she should now, as it were, waylay him. She said at once, after respectfully greeting him, that she had been there, waiting for him, ever since six o'clock in the morning.

‘Waiting for me!’ exclaimed Sir John. ‘Pray may I ask what may be the business which should occasion it?’

‘Certainly,’ replied Mrs. Morton. ‘Sir John, mine is a business of no common kind.’

‘Pray, madam, resume your seat,’ said Sir John. ‘Is there anything I can do to oblige you?’

‘Much, very much,’ answered Mrs. Morton, in an agitated tone, as she sank down upon the seat, and Sir John took his by her side. After a little while, in which she made a strong effort to repress her disturbed feelings, and to gain courage to speak the full purpose of her mind, she continued: ‘Sir John, I do not come on my own account. I come for the sake of the children of my lost and beloved benefactress, once your wife. Sir John, you do not, you cannot know it; your children are starving.’

He started and changed colour ; his countenance was indeed altered.

‘Aye, Sir John, you may well start at hearing such a word; for they are your children. But so cruelly is all intercourse prevented between you and them, that you have not the most distant idea of the miserable condition to which they are reduced. O ! Sir John, as you are a man, as you are a father, call up your spirit, exercise your own legitimate authority, and suffer no one, wife or no wife, thus to trample on the natural claims of your own offspring by her who was a wife to you indeed. Sir, you promised Lady Fairland on her death-bed that you would be a loving father to her children.’

‘And pray wherein have I failed ?’ he asked sternly.

‘In giving up your own natural and rightful control over them to another, who has not only exercised but abused it ; who has employed it, if not for their destruction, at least for their misery. Sir John,’ she continued, tearing open the little parcel she had brought with her—‘ Sir John, is this bread (producing

the piece of a loaf coarse almost to blackness) fit for Sarah Fairland's children?' She broke it before him; he took a portion from her hand, and kept it.

• 'I know,' she said, after a moment's pause, 'I know that what I now do and say will procure me such ill blood at Northleigh Hall that every means will be tried were it possible to ruin me in revenge for it. But I care not; I will do what is right. I will speak the truth in the face of all the world, though I and my fatherless children should beg our bread from door to door in requital for it. I fear not. Sir John, do you, can you forget the dead! the dead in her who was once most dear to you?'

'No, woman, no,' said Sir John, much moved; 'but wherefore these questions? I do not forget the dead. I have, perhaps, but too much cause for remembering.'

'Think, then, O! think, that in me, in the voice of the living friend, you hear that of your lost wife, who from her grave—the grave to which she was hastened, I will not say by whose unkindness—now pleads with you. Think you hear her calling

upon you, and saying : " As you shall answer it to God at the dread day of account, I bid you do justice to my children." Sir John, do you know how they are kept, and to what indignities, what hardships, what companionship they are exposed?'

'I know nothing to their injury,' said Sir John.

'Hear it then from me, and know the truth,' continued Mrs. Morton, with the same energetic manner in which she had hitherto addressed him. 'Their food is often such as you would not give to the very beggar at your gates. Their clothing is mean and contemptible, their society that of any who will come to their door and take compassion on them, so as to supply them with some aid, some comfort. You have daughters, sweet young creatures, approaching towards womanhood. I am assured that many idle young men, of far inferior birth and station, have sought to obtain a familiar footing with them. Is this fitting company, think you, for the daughters of Sir John Fairland? Is this the way in which they experience a father's protection and a father's care? Sir John, look into your own heart,

search there, and then answer to yourself, have you fulfilled the promise that you made to the dying saint your wife in respect to her children? In her name, in God's name, I look for a reply.'

The uncommon spirit, the energetic manner, the deep feeling which Mrs. Morton displayed as she thus addressed Sir John Fairland, absolutely overcame him; he stood silent with awe before her. A poor widow, who toiled for her daily bread, painfully, humbly, thus had the power to confound and render dumb with shame a rich baronet; so great, so paramount is the force of truth when urged by a brave and noble spirit. He did not utter one word in reply; for even in this moment of strong emotion there was something of pride that led him to maintain an obdurate reserve, a sullen silence, when he felt he could neither condemn nor confute his accuser.

Both were now standing. Mrs. Morton looked him in the face. 'What, not a word, Sir John? Give me but one word of hope for your children. I ask it in the name of her who loved them and loved you so well. One word; it is all I ask.'

‘Well, then, take it,’ said Sir John, sternly ; ‘I will do them right.’

He prepared to leave her. ‘May God bless you,’ she said, ‘for that word. I see by your indignant looks that the storm is up. May it fall on the right head.’

Sir John Fairland waved his hand, and they parted,

CHAPTER IV.

They threat me ; I shall never come to bliss
Till all these mischiefs be returned again,
Even in their throats that have committed them.

Shakespeare.

SIR JOHN returned home immediately, entered the house by a private door towards the garden, spoke to no one, and instantly sought Lady Fairland. Without even the ceremony of knocking he opened her dressing-room door. As she looked up from her toilet she was surprised to observe his darkened brow and the stern and angry expression of his whole countenance, whilst he addressed her with a short, abrupt manner, and enquired with passionate earnestness, 'whether she had of late visited his children, and personally acquainted herself with their condition ?'

'No, Sir John,' she replied. 'No, indeed ; I have not personally sought them. But what means this rude

intrusion at the hour of my toilet, and these dark looks? It is not very likely, I think, that I should seek your children, to expose myself to a repetition of that disrespect with which they have invariably treated me ever since my marriage with their father— for *that* was my offence—and which you, Sir John, have but too much encouraged, by not checking them in the first instance, and by not teaching them their duty to your wife.'

'I encourage my children to treat you with disrespect?' said Sir John. 'You know the charge is false. It is but too probable that if they ever did treat you, as you say they did, with disrespect, it arose from your own exertion of an unwarrantable tyranny over the offspring of my first marriage. They *had* a tender mother; but I need not point out to the woman who, for so many years, experienced her bounty as a mistress, what was her worth.'

'As a mistress! Your former wife my mistress, indeed! You speak, Sir John, as if I had been the servant, rather than the friend and companion, aye, and the equal of your first wife.'

‘Her equal you never were,’ replied Sir John, passionately. ‘In you there was nothing either in birth or manners to make you such. Her companion, it is true, you were, for your own purposes—which I have since learnt too well—and you were so far a friend to her that, by breaking her heart, you helped her to that heaven where she is now at peace.’

‘What means all this?’ exclaimed Lady Fairland, extremely astonished at a kind of language and a bitterness of tone and manner such as in all their quarrels, frequent as they were, she had never before witnessed in Sir John. But he had been greatly worked upon by the honest vehemence of Mrs. Morton and by a full knowledge of the ill-treatment of his children. Lady Fairland, with all her cunning, and notwithstanding the ascendancy she had so strangely acquired over the mind of a weak, capricious husband, had yet to learn that there are moments when, under the influence of a strong passion, the weak and usually pusillanimous will burst their trammels and speak home-truths respecting the vices of the very creatures by whom they have hitherto been most

commonly held in awe. Even so was it now. Sir John Fairland was in a hot mood, and cared not what he said, nor with what consequences.

Determined, however, to face it out, and if possible to turn the current of the angry waters into another channel, Lady Fairland now fiercely reproached him for his injustice in charging her with the neglect of his wilful and worthless offspring, for whom she had cared even as for her own.

‘What, madam!’ exclaimed Sir John, seizing her arm and holding her firmly by it, as with the other hand he held out before her the piece of bread he had received from Mrs. Morton. ‘Is *this* such bread as you would give to your own children? Yet this you give to the children of Sarah Fairland. Look at it, handle it, taste it; for the very dogs that eat from your hand have you better catered than for my children.’

Lady Fairland looked confounded; she was for the moment absolutely dumb from surprise. It was evident that Sir John had become acquainted with the truth; he must have visited the children suddenly

without her knowledge. She was preparing to meet his accusations with an angry retort, when Sir John, who by the violence of his passion had worked himself into boldness, cut short her purpose by making known his pleasure in a manner that convinced her he would be obeyed.

‘Hark you, madam,’ he said, ‘I will no longer suffer these indignities to be offered to me and to my children. I have been weak, too easily led, too much the slave of your will. But all things have a limit, and your line is nearly run out. My children shall henceforth live under my own roof, if it like you or not. I shall not, however, immediately bring them hither. For the present they shall be cared for where they now are under my direction. I shall think, at my leisure, where it will be best to fix their future home. My eldest born, Sarah’s son, shall be placed under proper care, and my daughters shall be taught as Sarah would have had them, so that in due time perchance they may resemble their mother. Who shall say Nay to it? And I will find some way in which to show my thankfulness to the

friend—the true friend—who had the courage to step in and save a father from the shame and the misery of being made the tool to destroy his own children. Now you know my pleasure. Do not reply. I want not to quarrel with you ; but you know my will, and as God shall judge between us, it shall be fulfilled. Not a word in opposition ; I will hear nothing.’

He rushed from Lady Fairland, who would have detained him, and saw her no more that day.

The result of Mrs. Morton’s spirited conduct was, that not only immediate and proper care was shown to the children, but for some few years their condition was much ameliorated. The boy Charles was sent to a grammar school, where he made more than ordinary progress under an excellent master. The girls were also sent to a well-conducted school, the mistress being the sister of Mrs. Morton’s deceased husband, and they also benefited by instruction and good example.

For Sir John, though his worthless wife had been compelled at the moment to bend before the storm that so fearfully burst upon her, yet by her

artful demeanour and her knowledge of the man with whom she had to deal, she soon regained that ascendancy which for a time had been shaken, but not destroyed. Sir John was the slave of evil habits; by the force of circumstances and strong passion, he could now and then break through them, but he had neither strength of mind nor perseverance sufficient to shake them off altogether. It soon became evident that, from supineness of temper and the love of ease, rather than hold a perpetual domestic warfare with Lady Fairland, he yielded to her almost as absolutely as he did before their last bitter quarrel, and bowed once more beneath the yoke which had formerly so long galled him. He resumed it with the most passive indifference, if that could be called such, which in a great measure arose from the very recklessness of despair. We must now speak of other matters.

Notwithstanding a vast deal of pomp and display, and many attempts to gain a character for hospitality, the second Lady Fairland's cruel conduct to the offspring of the first marriage got wind, and was

so much talked of, and Mrs. Morton so much admired for the bold and fearless part she had taken for their welfare, that the neighbourhood began to be very distant towards the stepmother of those innocents, and at last altogether shunned her society. Northleigh Hall gradually became more and more deserted; and consequently the vicinity became so very disagreeable both to its master and mistress that they earnestly wished to remove elsewhere.

Whilst they were considering what could be done for the best at such a juncture, it was discovered that a very considerable portion of the old house was in a dangerous state. Sir John determined that to rebuild would be cheaper in the end than to repair. For this purpose another residence, at least for a time, became absolutely necessary; and if he should find himself more comfortable in his new home than in his present neglected mansion, very possibly he might continue there during the remainder of his days. Neither Sir John nor his lady were sorry to have so good an excuse for quitting

Northleigh, as nobody could now say they had been driven from it by what were so evident, the slights and the daily increasing neglect of their neighbours.

Just at this crisis the proprietor of Hartland Abbey (a lady and a minor) was in such delicate health that it was deemed necessary for her recovery she should reside in Italy for some years; and thither her guardian, who felt a paternal care for her, proposed to conduct her with the least possible delay. In Hartland Abbey she had never resided, and it was to let. Singularly enough, about the same period, Mr. Noland, on the death of an aged uncle; came into possession of a small estate, together with a good house and grounds, in the vicinity of Hartland. Thither he at once retired, intending for the future merely to carry on a part of his business; a practice sufficient to oblige a few of his old clients, and to secure to himself some not very laborious occupation.

Sir John Fairland knew all this, and not doubting that his old attorney would still feel disposed to do for him a friendly office, wrote to him without delay

on the affair he had so much at heart—namely, to become the tenant of the Abbey. Mr. Noland readily undertook the negotiation, and managed it to the satisfaction of all parties.

On the Michaelmas Day, therefore, of that year from which the lease was dated, did Sir John Fairland remove, first his choicest pictures, his valuables, and his household goods, and then himself, his lady, his children, and the greater number of his domestics, to the old monastic pile—HARTLAND ABBEY.

CHAPTER V.

The mansion's self was vast and venerable,
With more of the monastic than has been
Elsewhere preserved ; the cloisters still were stable,
The cells, too, and refectory, I ween :
An exquisite small chapel had been able,
Still unimpair'd, to decorate the scene ;
The rest had been reformed, replaced, or sunk,
And spoke more of the Baron than the monk.—*Byron.*

OF the first few years of Sir John Fairland's residence at Hartland Abbey, we shall but notice one circumstance which occurred soon after his removal thither ; it was, that his wife recommended to his notice and introduced into the family a young man, a distant relation of her own, whom she called cousin Richard, in the capacity of chief steward and secretary to Sir John.

Mr. Richard Graves was expert in business, shrewd, quick, and observing ; indeed, insinuating in his manners, wherever it became worth his while to

please. He deemed himself philosophical ; and as Lords Hervey, Bolingbroke, Chesterfield, and other men of talent and eminence in their day, avowed themselves free-thinkers, it became rather fashionable with the pretenders to abstract science and other coxcombs of the time to profess themselves free-thinkers also ; and if, like Mr. Richard Graves, they happened to be rogues to boot, it was very convenient thus to shake off the shackles of moral and religious obligation. Graves, supported by the paramount influence of Lady Fairland, soon gained a complete hold over the mind and affairs of Sir John, and somehow contrived in so many instances to confuse the one and complicate the other that he showed as much dexterity in such achievements as if he had been in the full practice of a pettifogging attorney. He had indeed been trained in the office of one with excellent skill ; his removal from the desk of this exemplary master to the service of Sir John was occasioned by the latter offering a more tempting prospect to his future and long-sighted calculations. He had, therefore, eagerly availed himself of his

present position, and entered upon its profits (which he called duties) as soon as they were chalked out for him by his obliging cousin, the baronet's lady.

Charles Fairland, the eldest son of the first marriage, had now attained his twentieth year; and though knowing that the power of his father over his own estates, and those which he held in right of his former wife, was such that he could at any time cut him off and his sisters also from all inheritance, and give the whole to his second family, yet could Charles never prevail with himself—for he was naturally of a high spirit—to treat his stepmother with other than distant and haughty respect. He longed for independence, and had often entreated his father to bring him up to some profession—the church, the bar, the army, anything—rather than make him a gentleman at large, with no certainty of any provision hereafter. But hitherto, in reply to all these most urgent and rational entreaties, he had obtained nothing more from his father than vague and indecisive answers. One step, however, all the children of the first marriage had gained—they were suffered

to live, though very unhappily, under the same roof with their father at the Abbey.

One day Sir John was sitting in his own private apartment, called the Abbot's Chamber, when he was surprised by the sudden entrance of his son Charles, who came before him equipped for a journey. At all times there was little cordiality between the father and the son. The former had been strongly prejudiced against his presumptive heir by the arts of the woman who was his second wife ; and the latter, who looked upon her as the cause of his own mother dying of a broken heart, and of the long suffering, the cruel neglect experienced by his sisters and himself in their childhood, did not feel that reverential respect which it is to be wished every son should entertain towards a father.

Hence had arisen great dissensions and much misery between them. Domestic quarrels are always the bitterest ; and if very near relatives do not love each other, they seldom stop at indifference ; hatred too often springs up from the ground that has been fertilised and sown by self-interest, jealousy, and

deceit on the one hand, and by injured rights and irritated passions on the other. The estrangement which of late had kept father and son aloof from each other arose to such a degree that they now seldom met, although dwelling under the same roof; and when they did so, it was only to exchange angry words or complaining and reproachful expressions.

Sir John was, therefore, the more surprised to see his son Charles enter his apartment in a manner so unceremonious, and all at once address him with a bold, determined, and excited air, 'Sir, as a son, as your eldest son, however deeply I may feel I have been injured, I do not think it right to leave your house for ever without acquainting you with my purpose, and seeking from you some assistance to further me in the enterprise I have now in view. And, if it may be so, I would receive from you a father's blessing, should so much of natural feeling still exist in your heart towards me as to allow you to give it.'

The voice of Charles Fairland faltered as he spoke

these last words, he could not altogether conceal his emotion, and the tears which rose in his eyes at the moment he came to bid farewell showed that, however ill-used, he remembered that he was still a son.

Sir John did not at once send him from his presence in an angry tone, as of late he had been so much accustomed to do. On the contrary, he bade him speak out and tell his purpose ; and if it were such as he could approve, perhaps Charles might find that he would assist it more than he anticipated. There was something so unusual both in the manner and the looks of the baronet as he said this that his son was struck by it. He felt assured that some change (he could not guess from what cause) was working in his father's mind ; indeed, he had suspected it before. He had seen, for the last fortnight, that Sir John kept much alone, shunning the attentions even of his wife.

'Sir,' continued Charles, in reply to his father's bidding, not unkindly intimated, 'I presume you cannot be ignorant that the cause we have both so much at heart needs all the support that can

be given to it. Prince Charles Edward, with the brave Highland chieftains, and the gallant army of all ranks who have followed his fortunes, are now on their way to the capital of England. The last accounts that I have seen state that the Prince has raised his standard at Derby, and invited all his true friends to join him there in his meditated march on London. Sir, I am about to obey this summons. Give me, then, the means to depart, that I may offer my services to the Prince, as becomes a son of yours. Your name, your family, your influence in the west will be certain to procure for your eldest son a commission in the royal army. But if you deny me aid, then farewell indeed. I shall still go, but not as a beggared outcast from the house of my father. I shall conceal my real name, throw myself as a volunteer into the ranks of him whom the usurping Hanoverians call the Pretender, and trust to occasion and my own good sword to win a way to honour. Now, sir, you know my purpose. I entreat you, with all respect, to let me know yours. I cannot anticipate any regret on my departure, or that

the absence of your eldest son will be other than welcome to yourself and Lady Fairland.'

Sir John heard his son with patience, though with astonishment. He seemed moved. And if, as philosophers have supposed, a man has two spirits contending within him, the one for good the other for evil, certain it is that the good spirit was the most active in the breast of Sir John Fairland at this moment. He was greatly disturbed, and with feelings to which he had long been dead, fixing an earnest and a grieved look upon his son, he said, 'You do not know what you say, or how little cause you have, with me at least, to suppose that your absence is a thing to be desired. I—I am not well pleased with some circumstances that have come to light of late, and with others which at the present moment are more than suspected by me. But this is not the matter in question. It is impossible that I should consent to your leaving the Abbey on so wild an expedition. I have received private intelligence. The Highland chiefs have refused to follow their Prince in his determination to march on

London ; and they are quarrelling among themselves. They have, I am assured, already commenced their retreat, and it cannot be doubted, that the ruin of Charles Stuart's cause will be the consequence. Here are my letters (he handed them to his son as he spoke). Would you wish to peril my head and your own by bringing us both into suspicion ? Would you wish to cause a forfeiture of my estate, and all to no purpose ? Under such circumstances as you will see stated in those letters it would be madness to talk of joining the unfortunate man you are so desirous to serve.'

Charles Fairland was surprised and vexed to the very soul. But he stood silent, not knowing what to answer.

Sir John, after a short pause, resumed, 'But come now ; tell me, is not this sudden resolution to leave your father's house occasioned by this foolish love affair that I hear you are engaged in ? Tell me truth—is not Miss Isabella Fitzwarren at the bottom of it ?'

'Sir,' replied Charles, 'I will not deceive you.

Indeed, it is so unusual, and so gratifying, to have you ask about anything in which my happiness is concerned, that I rejoice to have it in my power to be as explicit with you as you could desire on a subject of vital interest to myself. It is true I love Miss Fitzwarren.'

'I know little about her,' said Sir John, 'except having sometimes seen her with the girls at the Abbey. Whose daughter may she be? who has the care of her?'

'She is an orphan, sir; her father was in the army, and served under the Duke of Marlborough. He was a very gallant officer, and lost his life in action. His daughter lives with a widowed aunt, Mrs. Elford, who considers her as her own child. Indeed, sir, Miss Fitzwarren has very great merits.'

'Has she any money?' enquired Sir John.

'None, sir.'

'How then could you fall in love with her?' said Sir John, looking at his son, as if to have something explained which he could not understand.

'Sir,' replied Charles, 'the eldest son of a man

of such estates as you possess, both in your own right and in that of my mother, might, I presume to hope, be allowed to give his hand where his heart was fixed without any prejudice to his family or to his duty.'

'You talk like an inexperienced boy,' said Sir John. 'How are you to live if you marry without money? You have no profession, and are doing nothing for yourself.'

'Give me, then, the means, open to me a way, to find employment for myself, and I will never burthen you more. O, sir! O, my dear father! do not turn a deaf ear to the solicitations of your son; do not condemn me to a state of perpetual dependence. Finally, perhaps, some one may prevail with you to cut me off when, from having no profession, time and habit may have rendered me incapable of procuring a maintenance. Do not thus deal by the child of her who was your most faithful and devoted wife, and the hope of whose birth—for so I have been told—was the means of preventing the most disastrous event that could have befallen you and me and my

sisters—a separation from our dear mother. If I have no other claim on your affection, let me not lose this.’

Sir John Fairland was greatly agitated ; he looked at his son, but did not immediately reply ; he paced the apartment, knit his brows, and appeared to suffer under his own reflections as much as he did under the energetic remonstrances of his son. At length he took Charles’s hand and wrung it in silence. The youth saw that, if he had not convinced his father, he had at least made some softening impression upon him, for in what had passed both his voice and his manner denoted sorrow more than anger.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘I rejoice to see this ; suffer me to open my heart to my father, and I have every hope that you will not find any feeling there which you would altogether condemn.’ He paused.

‘Speak on,’ said Sir John ; ‘I am not displeased with your frankness.’

‘While I live you shall never have cause to be so,’ replied Charles, with warmth. ‘Give me, then, my dear father, either the means to support my station

as your eldest son, who must hereafter maintain the name and honour of your house, or by giving me some profession, enable me to support myself with Isabella the choice of my heart, and I will burthen you no more.'

'This is folly,' said Sir John Fairland ; but he did not say it angrily. 'You will find twenty girls that will please your fancy quite as well as this, besides having fortune to bring with them.'

'Indeed, sir, I shall not. Isabella is not one whose place could be easily supplied ; her merit, like her beauty, is of no common order, and it is no common affection that she has raised in my bosom. My feelings are not to be changed. And even if they were, I could not now, as a man of honour, desert her, having, I acknowledge, won an interest in her heart.'

Sir John frowned.

'Nay, frown not, my dear father ! Think how we have been placed, I and my dear sisters. The unkindness of our stepmother has often driven us from your roof, and we have sought for kindness and

society under that of Mrs. Elford. Thus did our intimacy with her and Isabella begin. Hence arose those daily walks in the woods of Hartland, and all that train of little circumstances by which young hearts are drawn to each other before they are aware of the chain by which they are bound. O, my father! give me but some assurance that I may believe you will not hereafter cast off my sisters and myself from your care, and I will pledge you the word of a son that, although I can never cease to love Isabella, I will never wed her unless I attain independence, or without your consent.'

Sir John seemed much touched by these earnest remonstrances, and he gave his son a solemn promise that he would never abandon him or his sisters, would take into consideration all he had said, and that after his death Charles should find he was mistaken in thinking that he had disregarded the children of their ever-regretted mother.

Charles knew that his father was of a fluctuating mind, and that though when strongly touched in his affections he would mean well to-day, he would, alas!

be turned aside to-morrow by the woman who had obtained so great an influence over him. He dared scarcely rely on these promises, yet was he rejoiced to find that the appeal he had so long wished to make to his father's feelings had been so well received.

There was another point he desired to touch upon—one of great delicacy—yet he knew not how to advert to it till his father gave him the opportunity by asking what it was that had caused him to more than hint his fears about his sisters and himself in time to come ; in plain terms, what it was he apprehended ?

‘Our stepmother, Sir John,’ Charles replied, in a peculiar tone. ‘My father, I do not like to wound your feelings, more especially in this the first hour of confidence between us ; yet there are things that ought to be told.’

Sir John Fairland looked surprised.

‘Sir,’ continued Charles, in a quick and agitated manner, as if determined to get through a task the most painful ; ‘Sir, there are some who think

that you are grievously abused, not merely by Lady Fairland, but by another individual in close combination with her for what is neither good nor honest—for what a son cannot name to a father.'

Sir John started, turned deadly pale, and said eagerly, 'Of whom do you speak?'

'Of Mr. Richard Graves, sir, your secretary.'

Sir John Fairland absolutely gasped for breath on hearing this, so sudden, so unexpected was it, from the lips of his son. He dropped down in a chair that stood near him. So great was the shock, so strong the sense of injury within his bosom, that he lost all power of self-command. All that distance which he had hitherto observed in making his son a stranger to his thoughts and fears, was in a moment forgotten; and clasping his hands as he wrung them in the extremity of his passionate feelings, he set his teeth together, looked upward, and at length said, in the bitterness of his soul, 'Curse her! ungrateful woman. I had myself entertained some suspicions, but I thought I might be mistaken. I did not dream that her infamy was so barefaced as to

have attracted the observation of others, and to learn it from my own son. And the scoundrel Graves! I can now understand why I am so counselled by Lady Fairland to—and to trust my children to the care of Graves—honest Mr. Graves!—if anything should happen to me! The villain; he looks to step into my place! But I will deal with him in a way he little thinks. Hark ye, Charles; come hither. I should never have told you of these matters, but you glanced at them; you spoke something, and I have said too much now to draw back. Can I trust you? Will you forget the past, and be to me as a son indeed?’

‘Sir, I hope I have hitherto done nothing that should cause you to doubt my sense of duty, and that I may be trusted by my father.’

‘I believe it. You are a good youth. First, then, know that Graves has, I fear, led me into a most injurious money transaction with a fellow whom I have only this day discovered to be a cheat—aye, a villain. I cannot but suspect, from this and other circumstances, that my steward, my secretary, as you

call him, relying on the easy trust which, at the instance of my wife, I have hitherto reposed in him, has some deep design on my property, and may need the help of a confederate.'

'I am grieved, but not surprised to hear this,' said Charles; 'but if this were the worst'—he paused, and Sir John filled up the pause by saying—

'It is not the worst. I am too much disturbed to be capable of cool consideration. I will now only say this. I have cause to suspect Graves and my wife—the wife who, I will confess to you, has of late made me the most miserable man alive. Yet there are circumstances; I am too much in her power. I cannot, I dare not, do all I would do at this moment, unless my worst suspicions are confirmed. But I will take such measures that these wily serpents shall not escape chastisement. Charles, say not a word to any living creature, but watch closely; keep an eye on Graves, on them both, and tell me all you hear, see, suspect. Let not a word, a half-spoken word, escape you. In the interval I will lay a snare, and the devil, whom they have long served, will not

be slow to lead them into it. But time will be required, some days at least, before my scheme can be brought to bear. Yet it will not, I trust, fail me. Remember, silence, caution, watchfulness, Farewell.'

CHAPTER VI.

The image of a wicked, heinous fault
Lives in his eye ; that close aspect of his
Does show the mood of a much troubled breast.

Shakespeare.

WHEN Sir John Fairland dismissed Charles from his presence he was in a state of mind such as his son, who had seen him in many instances of passion, had never before witnessed. He proceeded forthwith to summons his secretary to attend upon him.

As Graves entered the room he looked up ; he was struck with the air of angry determination which at the moment was strongly imprinted on every feature of his hitherto complacent patron. Nor did he like the abrupt manner in which Sir John addressed him, saying—

‘ So, Mr. Graves, I find by information I have this day received, from one whose accuracy I have never had cause to doubt, that it is known your friend, Mr.

Sharp, has decamped ; and I also find that you, who undertook to manage the whole affair, have, by your negligence, let him finger the money before the security was completed. This man, Mr. Graves, was a money-borrower of your own recommending. You pressed the fellow on my notice, and urged me to supply him with the loan he wanted on his own terms, and by which I risked and have sustained a great loss. What have you to say to all this ?’

‘ Say, Sir John ? ’ replied Graves, somewhat abashed by the suddenness of the charge and the determination with which it was made. ‘ To say, Sir John ? Why, I have this to say, that I am much surprised you should doubt my zeal to serve you, when I have toiled for you and made your affairs my own ever since I have been in your service. Suspensions such as these are most injurious to my character ; I feel them so much that I scarcely know what to answer.’

‘ I believe you,’ said Sir John ; ‘ I believe you know not how to evade the charge you cannot confute. I doubt not you have made my affairs your own, but

whether most for my interest or yours is a matter that may admit some question. How came it, sir, that the sum of money which, by your persuasion, I was induced to lend this very good friend and relative of yours, this Mr. Sharp, was taken from rents just received by you in my absence, and paid over to him before you had my sanction ?'

'Sir John,' answered Graves, 'I did it by the authority of one who well understands your concerns, and who sanctioned the advance of the loan without delay. Lady Fairland, sir, was my authority for what I did.'

'O! was she so?' said Sir John, biting his lip with passion whilst he spoke; and though he endeavoured to suppress his jealous rage, he was too strongly excited to keep it under. In spite of all his more prudent resolves, in spite of those cautions he had so lately enjoined on his son as necessary to observe towards Graves, he now exclaimed, 'So, sir, you and Lady Fairland, it seems, managed this affair between you. I doubt it not by the result. Pray, sir, are there any other affairs in which you feel yourself

authorised in my absence to step into my place with Lady Fairland ?’

As Sir John uttered these rash words he looked Graves full in the face with an expression of fierceness in his own such as made the secretary tremble. But Graves endeavoured to regain his self-possession, as he said :

‘Sir John Fairland, your behaviour to me this evening is unaccountable. I am willing, however, to place the best construction upon it. Men are not always in the same mood, even with their most faithful friends. I am willing, therefore, to attribute the strangeness of your present manner to something having vexed you without doors, which you resent on me.’

‘The strangeness of my manner, sir !’ exclaimed Sir John ; ‘and you are willing to place the best construction on what I say and do ! and this when I tell you that I am no longer deceived by you ! This insolence is past bearing. But this is neither time nor place for such discussions. Look you, sir, to this money-lending business you have taken in hand.

Look you find out this friend of yours who has possessed himself of my property by your means, or be the consequences on your own head. For, if there be justice in Heaven or law on earth, *you* shall pay dearly for your conduct. Look to it. And now, Mr. Graves, I hope we understand each other.'

'We do, indeed, Sir John; and now I know what thanks I am to expect in return for all the services I have rendered you since I came under your roof.'

'Talk of your services to me! Talk rather of your negligence. Where are the papers of so much consequence in my suit concerning Gilbert's mortgage? those papers, I mean, which you neglected to forward to the Master in Chancery during the last term. The court meets again in a week, and without them the Master cannot make his report. Where are those papers?'

'Safe, Sir John; safe in my keeping. But with such a multiplicity of business as your affairs bring on me, I cannot always at a day's notice lay my hands on such documents as you may require. The papers,

however, to which you allude shall be produced in good time for the court.'

'In good time for the court!' said Sir John. 'Nay, sir, to-night; this very night shall they be produced. I must despatch them to London early to-morrow, and this night do I insist on their being placed in my hands.'

Sir John spoke this in a tone of the highest displeasure; for he had worked himself into a vehement passion with his secretary.

'It is a late hour to demand of me such a search as I must make to find the missing papers, Sir John,' replied Graves; 'wait till the morning.'

'The *missing* papers! is it so? I guessed as much. And wait till the morning! But I will not wait till the morning; this night, this night will I have them.' And ever contradictory and unstable in his resolves, Sir John, now completely forgetful of all his preconcerted prudence, seemed determined to pick a quarrel with Graves rather than to keep the peace with him. He continued, 'In this matter I will wait no man's pleasure but my own. Hark you, Mr. Graves; either

produce the papers this night, or quit my service for ever to-morrow morning. Now, sir, you know my mind, so make your choice.'

Thus driven, Graves, who saw well enough from the altered tone and determined demeanour of his patron that he could not long hope to retain either favour or office, quitted the chamber in the utmost confusion of mind. Notwithstanding the time of night, he complied with Sir John's peremptory orders; but in the hurry of searching among the documents at such an hour he unconsciously mixed up with those of Sir John one or two *private papers* of his own (for Graves, with all his roguery, was careless and slovenly in matters of business) that were of a most curious and important nature. More of this anon.

After placing the bundle of papers required on the table, the secretary spoke only a few words, intimating to Sir John that he felt certain he would find there all he desired, though, from the hurried manner in which he had been called on to produce them at such a late hour, he had not had the opportunity of examining them or of arranging them in due order. He

then retired slowly and sulkily from the apartment, lingering a moment at the door, as if he fancied that after all Sir John might call him back to bid him good-night, and so to soften matters between them, before he retired to rest ; this had happened more than once, for some few occasional quarrels had occurred between Sir John and his secretary before now, and at their close, partly by his own audacity, and partly by Lady Fairland's interference, Graves had always come off victor, and been fully reinstated in his patron's favour. But it was not so in this instance ; and Sir John let him go without offering a word to break the moody silence in which they parted for the night.

After he was gone, Sir John turned to the papers. They were really much wanted in Chancery, for among the benefits procured for him by Graves's management of his affairs was that of being always involved in law with some one or other, and often was the matter of contest worth neither the trouble nor the cost.

In taking up the papers a letter dropped from among them—the handwriting was that of Graves. Sir John Fairland saw at a glance it was one which in no way

concerned his law affairs, and that the contents were of a different nature. But the writer was Graves, and convinced from an expression or two which caught his eye, as he carelessly unfolded the sheet, that in many respects it was one of importance to himself, he rejoiced in having the means of detecting his secretary in some new villany. He turned to the back of the letter; but there was no address. It seemed to be a copy or rough draft of an epistle of more than ordinary interest, most especially to Sir John Fairland, and he began to read it.

He had not proceeded far when Tom Wakeum entered the room unobserved. As soon as his presence was noticed he was ordered to withdraw, but not before he had had time to perceive that his master's countenance was deadly pale, and that he shook in every limb. Tom felt alarmed, and lingered unperceived near the door, and long after declared that as Sir John read on the letter he seemed absolutely frenzied from the force of his own indignant feelings. At length he became a little more composed, and refolding the paper the perusal of which had so

much shaken him, put it into his pocket, and for some time paced slowly and thoughtfully up and down the apartment. He soon after quitted it for his own chamber, where he said to Tom, who had anxiously followed him, 'I have been dreadfully deceived.'

Lady Fairland had already retired for the night ; indeed, she was in bed and sleeping. According to the rumoured account of these circumstances, when they afterwards became the theme of public discussion, it was said that on suddenly awaking from her sleep Lady Fairland saw her husband leaning over the bed, with a lamp in his hand, and looking upon her with so fearful an expression of countenance that in the terror of the moment she screamed aloud. He bade her be silent, as she valued her life, or it would be worse for them both. It was further said, that he then proceeded to question her closely about Graves in a very vehement and strange manner, asking if he had ever addressed any letters to her ; and that she strongly denied ever having received any from him, either whilst he was under

the same roof with her, or in his occasional absence from the Abbey.

Sir John, it was averred, seemed startled by the earnestness of her denial ; yet he was not satisfied, and he dropped some words which were sufficient to let Lady Fairland know that his passions as well as his suspicions were fearfully aroused. All at once he seemed to recover his self-possession, and, though she urged him to it, he absolutely refused to be more explicit, and finally retired to rest in another chamber, leaving her in doubt whether or not his intellects were disordered by the greatness of an internal struggle, the cause of which she too justly apprehended was jealousy awakened about herself.

CHAPTER VII.

What damp hangs on me?
These sprightly tuneful airs but skim along
The surface of my soul, not enter there ;
She does not dance to this enchanting sound ;
How, like a broken instrument beneath
The skilful touch, my joyless heart lies dead !
Nor answers to the master's hand divine ! *Young.*

THE reader cannot have gone thus far without observing that, with all his faults and follies, Sir John Fairland was capable of strong impressions of what was good and right ; of much natural affection when called forth by circumstances, or by an extraordinary appeal to his feelings. The great fault of his character was a fluctuating, an inconstant temper, arising from a want of steady principle. We need not illustrate these remarks by any other reference than to the scene in which we saw him act so prominent a part, where his right feelings overcame both his prejudices and his passions, so that he

recalled his first and suffering wife at the very moment he was about to part from her for ever. But it has also been seen how transient was the impression; he had not resolution enough to make that recall a happy one, either to her or to himself. On the whole, allowing for a defective education and the want of a better example in early life, Sir John might be said to be rather a very weak than a very wicked man. It is, however, true that weakness often becomes the abettor of wickedness by a spiritless non-resistance of evil on the part of those who do not exert the authority they possess to check it.

So had it been with Sir John Fairland. He had never intended to become the enemy of his own children; but he was made such by the supine and cowardly yielding up of his own legitimate authority as a parent to the arbitrary power of his second wife. We have seen how much he was moved by the just remonstrances of his son; he had not been so touched since Mrs. Morton, some years before, had spoken to him in behalf of the children of his first marriage.

But the hoped-for effects of this memorable interview with his son were in a great measure neutralized by his own irresolution, his ungoverned temper, and the vacillations of his conduct. In vain had he enjoined on that son wariness and caution, when he observed neither himself, and by his own folly might be said to have defeated his own plans. There could not be a doubt that his jealousy had so betrayed itself, that it put both Graves and Lady Fairland on their guard. Even on the next morning a very close observer might have seen a change in their demeanour to each other and to all around them. Lady Fairland showed some little acts of kindness and attention to Charles and his sisters, and Graves was civil to them, and did not meet any one of the young ladies in the hall or in the galleries of the old Abbey without affording them a smile and a bow.

This complacent humour, hitherto so unusual, lasted for the next two days; and a party of pleasure being proposed for the young people on the third, no objections were started. It was that they


should go with Mrs. Elford and her niece to be present at the sports of a harvest-home in the neighbourhood. The farmer about to celebrate it with all the Devonshire customs (then far more numerous and generally observed than in the present day) was a man of substance and great hospitality, and had made known his purpose to entertain both rich and poor on the occasion.

At the date of our tale there were few things more joyous than a harvest-home in the west of England. The spacious farm-house, the indications of good cheer, the well-stocked barns, the ricks of hay, and the animated farm-yard, where the very poultry strutted, cackled, and crowed with a seeming consciousness of their own importance among the living subjects of so princely a domain, under the absolute government of the opulent master, were all objects of joy. But though few can look on the sight of corn and plenty in their own country without a feeling of thankfulness to a good Providence that has blessed their native land and made it fruitful, it was not alone the sight of sheaves

and plenty which so much interested the young party, more especially the lovers, Charles and Isabella, on that day.

The scene around them was one of peculiar loveliness; it was pastoral, and truly English. The hills were seen in gentle slopes, here and there animated by flocks and herds; the tender green of the meadows was studded with the rich hues of summer flowers; and in the hedges, the foxglove, that grows with such extraordinary luxuriance in Devon, was seen in great abundance. Even the stubble fields, now alive with men, women, and children of all ages, presented such a picture of rural life, and added such cheerfulness to the scene, that many higher born might have envied, did they form a more just estimate of the distribution of human happiness than they are wont to do.

Among the many young women with tanned and glowing cheeks and laughing eyes, some pensive Ruth might perhaps be seen gleaning for some aged Naomi, whom years and infirmity kept at home; and as the master of the land was neither



niggardly nor selfish, he, like a second Boaz, had given orders that a generous remainder might be left for the gleaner's hand. After the young party had strolled from field to field, had chatted with the old folks, returned the bows and curtsies made to them by the young, and had given a good-natured word and a pat on the head to the children, they proceeded to witness the loading of the wains and *the calling of the neck*. In their day the ceremony was a more striking sight than it is at the present time, although still kept up in some parts of the county.

The custom is thus observed. When the corn is all reaped, towards evening the harvesters carefully select some of the finest ears from the sheaves. These are tied together, and form what is called *the nac*, or *the neck*. This, ornamented with flowers twisted in with the reed, has a gay and tasteful appearance. The reapers then repair in a body to some hill or elevation, and there call or *holla the neck*. One of the men bears the offering, stands in the midst, raises it, whilst all the other labourers gather about him and form themselves into a ring.

Each man holds aloft his hook, and with one accord they all shout, in the hearty endeavour which can be loudest, 'Arnack, Arnack, Arnack! We ha'un, we ha'un, we ha'un!' The shouts are several times repeated, as between each, probably as their way of libation, the firkin is handed round the circle. When the evening is fine, various bands of reapers may be heard for miles round, each stationed on some height, and shouting, as if in answer to each other. Women, girls, and children accompany the men to the performance of this ceremony, and may be seen, some with caps and bonnets decorated with flowers, others carrying boughs, and many dancing and singing, whilst the men practise the above rites in a circle. This very curious custom is considered by learned antiquaries to be derived from the Druids, and to be nothing less than the offering of the first and the best fruits of the earth to the God of the harvest.* There is something peculiarly anima-

* This account of calling the neck at the end of the harvest in Devonshire the writer has ventured to draw from her work, *The Borders of the Tamar and the Tavy*.

ting in its observance as the echoes of their joyous shouts reverberate from hill to hill.

The little party from the Abbey now continued their walk, and passed in their way many of those wild and romantic scenes which render the neighbourhood of Hartland Abbey so peculiarly delightful. Beautifully wooded ravines appeared among the hills and extended close to the sea-shore; whilst the broken cliffs and rugged precipices that overhung the rocks or beach below afforded a striking contrast to the bright verdure and the pastoral repose of the inland scene, more especially to the valley, above whose thick and venerable woods arose the dark and antiquated towers of the Abbey—for at the time of our narrative the hand of destruction had not been laid upon it. In this valley were seen ‘the dappled deer,’ some enjoying the shade of over-arching boughs, and others on the banks of the clear stream slaking their thirst in its refreshing waters, whose murmurs, like the instrumental part of a concert, seemed to accompany the songs of the blackbird, the linnet, and the thrush, the only

choristers then remaining within the holy vale, where once the chant of sacred melodies daily resounded to the praise of God, and of saints consecrated by the Church of Rome to prayer and worship.

If the eye turned from this charming valley towards the sea, the wooded heights on either side served like a rich framework to a picture, enhancing the beauty of the object within it. On this day it was one of grandeur and repose. The golden rays of the sun, almost too dazzling for sight, rested upon the waters in a long line of light, whilst many vessels with sails spread before the breeze, and many boats, like dark floating spots, were seen to glide over the calm and gleaming waves with a gentle and undulating motion.

When thus viewed under the repose of a day so still, so undisturbed by wind or tempest, there was in the valley of Hartland something sweetly soothing, friendly to meditation, and calculated to lull into tranquillity the disturbed passions of the soul. Its effects were not lost on Charles and Isabella. They had, if not long, yet dearly loved each other ; they

had felt all the pain arising from their uncertain prospects ; and though Charles, with all the ardour of a lover's mind, was willing to hope the best, and to think it would not be long ere his father would make some provision for him, and enable him to call Isabella his own, yet had he recently seen too much of Sir John's changeable disposition and of his stepmother's rancour entirely to indulge such hopes. Now and then the *tremor cordis* would come over him ; and although walking by the side of Isabella, her sylph-like form supported by his arm, and reading in her eyes that love the expression of which not even the maiden bashfulness of seventeen could conceal, he did not feel altogether happy.

Yet angry with himself, and vexed that on a day set apart for rejoicing he should thus be assailed by doubts and depression, he said playfully, trying to force himself into cheerfulness (the most certain way to remain sad)—

‘ Let us, Isabella, return and seek my sisters ; they must be somewhere on the beach, and then we will once more join the harvest-home party. I will

hope—but I cannot tell how it is ; never before this day did I look with such melancholy forebodings on the Abbey yonder. It seems to me, as it stands there encompassed by the dark woods, as if it were an abode fit neither for the peace of holy monks nor for domestic enjoyment.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Isabella, laughing. ‘You are thinking of your mother-in-law, as if she were the only inhabitant of those old weather-beaten towers ; but she is not so fearful a personage as your fancy would represent her. Let us seek your sisters ; the dear girls are far more cheerful than yourself. Do shake off this melancholy mood.’

Charles promised to endeavour to be cheerful, and they set off to seek his sisters on the beach.

It was towards evening when these young persons once more joined the festive scene. Many of the neighbouring gentry, most of the opulent farmers, a few of the clergy, and a host of youths and maidens, formed the upper ranks now assembled, who were to partake, at a separate table, of a very excellent supper ; whilst one of great abundance and no less

merit in its way was to be served up in the huge old kitchen and in one of the barns, not only for the labourers, and servants, male and female, but for fathers, mothers, and grandfathers, who either worked now or formerly had worked on the farm or in the neighbourhood ; for all were welcome on this joyous night.

The evening was lovely. The wains, laden with corn and surmounted by the reapers, brought home the harvest with great noise and shoutings. Nothing could exceed the boisterous joy of the whole assembly, both within and without the house. A cask of the best cider was set a-broach to drink a good luck to the harvesters. A dewy coolness was in the air, the more refreshing as the day had been intensely hot, and one of those showers, which often fall suddenly in the more hilly parts of Devon, especially near the sea, where they attract every wandering cloud, fell in large drops, and rendered the atmosphere fragrant. The fields and meadows around the house sent forth a delicious perfume of wild thyme and sweet herbs. Everyone seemed

to welcome the shower as peculiarly refreshing after the heats and labours of the day, for all had laboured; even those who came only for pleasure found that, too, was not unmingled with toil.

And now came the hour when the rough but open-hearted master of the feast bade all his guests, from the highest to the lowest, be seated at the several tables, with a hearty welcome to such fare as he had to set before them. Ere anyone ventured to take his seat, a blessing was invoked upon the board by good Parson Turnbull, who invariably made it a rule to act as voluntary chaplain to all the harvest-home suppers for as many miles round as his little fat ambling cob could contrive to carry him.

- The guests were seated, the dishes uncovered, the viands smoked; but all were silent. The knives and forks had all the noise to themselves, for at no period, either in town or country, were the English, especially of the humbler class, ever a talkative people over good cheer. But this discussed, and the ale, cider, and punch set flowing, it was altogether another thing. Toasts were given, healths were drunk and huzzaed again and

again, bowls were filled, emptied, and replenished ; songs were sung, mirth was at its height, and laughter was re-echoed in roaring peals from the hall to the kitchen and the kitchen to the barn. Fiddles were set going, and pipe and tabor ; and the young and gay were soon footing it in little parties, according to their rank or their fancy, upon the turf in front of the house, and lighted by no other lamps than those the glowworm with her fairy taper might supply and the sweetly silvered orb of a rising moon. All were animated, all happy ; even Charles had forgotten his fears and his low spirits, and was dancing with all his might, and glancing sweet looks at his lively partner, the fair Isabella.

CHAPTER VIII.

O ! treach'rous night !
Thou lend'st thy ready veil to ev'ry treason,
And teeming mischiefs thrive beneath thy shade.

Hill.

Farewell !—God knows when we shall meet again ;
I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins
That almost freezes up the heat of life. *Shakespeare.*

ON a bench beneath a spreading beech, opposite to where the young party from the Abbey were tripping it away to pipe and tabor, sat Tom Wakeum and an old man who was a hind in the service of the farmer. Tom had his eyes fixed on his young master with a thoughtful and even anxious expression, not at all in harmony either with the place or the hour. His neighbour on the bench remarked his manner, and observing to Tom that he thought he was a peg too low, asked him if he would take a cup of spiced ale or a pottle of cider.

Tom shook his head to the invitation, and proceeded thus to open his mind to his friend :


‘I’ll tell you what it is, John Raikes. I’m in a mollencholly sort of a way to-night ; for I don’t like to see young master a dancing and jigging it away there so merrily, when I believe the devil is a warming the porridge for him at home. I heard our helly-cat madam say this morning, with my own ears, to that proud, sly rascal Mr. Secretary, as she calls him, when neither him nor her knew that I was within ear-shot ; I heard her say, says she : “I’ll be even with him yet, and Master Charles shall learn to his cost that he shall not complain of me, nor of you either, Mr. Graves, to his father, without having a score to settle with me for it.” I heard no more ; but I don’t like it.’

‘Think no more of it, then,’ said old Raikes ; ‘I’ll go and get the ale to drink confusion both to madam and her man with all my heart.’

So saying Raikes set off for the purpose, and left his friend sitting alone upon the bench. On his return he observed that Tom Wakeum looked, as he

expressed it, 'he could not tell how.' 'Why, now, what's this?' he enquired; 'you look, Tom, as if you had seen Satan in his own proper person.'

'Hush!' replied Tom. 'I don't know but I have heard him since you left me just now; and yet, now I think about it, it can hardly be an evil spirit. The strangest thing has happened that ever you heard tell in all your life, and yet as true as the Bible. Do you know, John Raikes, you were hardly gone off this seat, when I heard a voice behind me say distinctly, "Go home, Tom Wakeum; go home." "Go home!" said I, turning about to see the voice behind me; "for what should I go home? Old Master dines out at Squire Cornew's, and mistress has her maidens with her; what should I go home for?" Never trust me more, John Raikes, if a voice that couldn't be seen didn't make answer and say, "No matter for that; go home." "I won't go home," says I, stoutly. "I'm not wanted by old master, and I won't go home for any on'em else." And now, my good friend, I'm glad you are come, for I'll take a cup of ale; and there's going to be another song, and so, let Satan



tempt me how he will, he shan't get me to stir till I please.'

Tom took a cup of ale; and tried to be merry. But in every pause between mirth and song again and again did he aver the warning voice seemed to say to him, 'Tom, go home.' At length Tom became so exceedingly uneasy that he started up from his seat, and exclaimed, with a vehement oath which we will not repeat, 'I will go home.'

'Better wait for the rest of you, for your fellow-servants that be here. All will be returning to the Abbey by-and-by; better wait than go all alone by yourself,' said his friend Raikes.

'Why wait for any one?' replied Tom. 'There is something more in this queer thing than I can understand. Over and over again I'm solemnly told to go home, and go I will. Why should I be afeard to go?'

'Because it may be the tempter that bids you go,' replied Raikes.

'I don't care. I will go home, even though I be to meet the devil himself in the way.'

‘You may meet as bad a thing,’ said old Raikes. He looked round, put his head close to Tom Wakeum’s ear, and seemed as if afraid of his own voice as he added: ‘You may meet the SPECTRE HORSEMAN in your road.’

‘The what?’ enquired Tom, with a look of amazement.

‘The Spectre Horseman.’

‘What’s he?’

‘I don’t know; Heaven only knows. But— but— come a little nearer.’

Tom drew close up beside his friend.

‘Have you lived so long at yon old Abbey and have never heard tell the tale of blood concerning it and the Abbot’s Oak?’

‘No,’ said Tom; ‘for when the maidens and the old folk tell over the fire about such matters, I never give ear to their idle stories.’

‘Idle stories,’ exclaimed his friend. ‘Why, man, I tell you ’tis the real true cause, people say, why the heiress of the Abbey lives so far away from it over

seas, and so lets it out to your master as tenant. It's a fearful thing for men to say.'

'What's fearful for men to say?' enquired Tom, with impatience.

'Why, that so long ago as in the days of Bishop Brantingham, when the old monks at the Abbey were called canons—but I never could tell why they were called so—men do say that a man, one of they grim old monks, had a spite against his abbot, who was called William Beaumont, and so, watching his opportunity, one fine moonlight night, just such a night as it is now, maybe, he managed to waylay the abbot as he was a riding back home from a neighbouring lord's feast, and murdered him under the old oak tree, the tree that is called the oak of blood, or by some the Abbot's Oak, in the forest. By what tokens I cannot tell you; but the tale goes that the murderer was penitent for his wickedness, and that after doing some great penance as they call it, he had his pardon from the bishop. But here comes the terrible part of the story. It seems Abbot Beaumont's ghost was not well

pleased that his murderer should thus have escaped the hanging he deserved ; as from the time the bishop gave the murderer's pardon, the spirit of the murdered man could never rest. Men do say that about the full of the moon, a spectre horseman still keeps the path between the Oak of Blood and the old Abbey, and that no man may go by that way unarmed. This is all I know, and it's enough. None of our people hereabouts can tell if the story be true by their own seeing, for not a mother's son of them would enter upon that way near the full of the moon were it to win King George's crown, or the Pretender's hope to get it. But when I was a boy, I heard my father say that his father had seen the spectre in the forest. You see it was in this way—'

'I will not hear it,' said Tom, manfully ; 'man, devil, spectre, shall not stay me ; for even while you were a speaking your very last words did the voice tell me again solemnly to go home. I will saddle my horse and soon be there ; and, if all goes well, John Raikes, I'll be back again in less than half an hour, and

I'll tell you what the spectre had to say to me this night in Hartland Forest.'

Old Raikes shook his head. 'It's no good,' he remarked, 'to jest on such matters. But I'll lend you a helping hand to saddle and mount ;' and he added, in a tone that seemed very much to imply that he expected nothing less than the reverse of his good wishes, 'I pray you may come back again as safe as you go.'

The horse was soon bridled and saddled with care. Tom furnished himself with a stout cudgel, instead of a whip, buttoned up close to his chin, refused another drop of ale lest he should not be quite self-possessed, and, bidding good-night to Raikes, set off on his homeward-bound course, as his friend pronounced a benediction for his safety.

For some time his way was pleasant enough ; the light of a fine moon gave though a solemn, yet not a cheerless, character to the landscape which lay as it were sleeping in silence around : a silence that was alone broken by the sounds of the fiddles and the pipe and tabor, with the mirthful voices of the harvest-

home revellers. These sounds, however, gradually died away as Tom Wakeum distanced them by as quick a pace as he could prevail with the heavy and aged horse he rode to put on. At length he drew near the entrance of the Hartland domain, where he must of necessity pass the ill-omened wood, and that tree of terror.

There was something solemn and awe-inspiring in the valley at such an hour and under such circumstances : the profound repose, only broken by the stir of the boughs and leaves of the trees, the gentle plashings of the stream that ran along near his path, or the low and regular break of the surge, as the tide was flowing in, on the adjacent shore. The moon had now risen high in the heavens, and slowly and majestically glided on her way through the region of unnumbered stars, as the topmost boughs of the woods and every open space looked clear, bright, and silvery in all that calm and mystic beauty which no other hour and no other light can convey. The mournful sweetness of the night breeze stole along the forest, and more especially harmonised with those portions of

the scene where, from the thickness of the trees, nothing but a mass of dark foliage could be seen.

Full before him rose loftily, even above the wood tops, the towers of Hartland Abbey. Towards the north end they stood high in shade, showing only the grandeur of their outline in that broad dark bulk, which is ever so impressive in buildings, more especially when viewed during the obscurity of night. The front of the Abbey, where it was seen in the light of the moon, appeared cold, white, marble-like and solemn, giving no indication of inhabitation, except that through one of the latticed windows the far-spreading rays of a taper might be descried, burning like a twinkling star. Beyond the edifice, in the pale gleam which touched with exquisite beauty the wooded slopes of the hills, appeared the far-receding vale of Hartland. Above the whole swept the broad arch of heaven, now radiant and sublime.

Directly in front of the path which the determined rider was pursuing, in spite of traditionary terrors and his own secret fears, arose in fine contrast with the scene we have attempted to depict a rugged and

venerable oak, far gone in years and decay, hollow in its trunk, bald at the top, and giving forth from its many shattered branches a melancholy sound to every breeze that wandered by. Some more vigorous and lofty trees which stood near, so completely intercepted the light of the moon, that the oak lay before the path of the rider in deep shadow. Nothing but the outline of its vast and gnarled body could be seen; a mass of darkness. To the eye of a terrified fancy it might seem like the genius of the forest guarding the pathway that led from the Abbey through the most deep and lonely recesses of the wood. This was the Oak of Blood.

Tom Wakeum, resolute as he was, and not at all subject to imaginary fears, could not approach the spot without shuddering. But Tom was an honest fellow; he had a conscience at ease, and might therefore very well defy any spectre, whether mounted or on foot. He was determined not to give way to his fears, and so, wishing to cheer up his spirits by the sound of a human voice, and not liking the dismal sighing and moaning made by the boughs

of the old oak, he disturbed the silence around by whistling the then prohibited Jacobite air of 'Over the water to Charlie;' a thing more creditable to his courage than to his loyalty to King George. His whistling, however, was soon stopped.

In the very height of his tune, he all at once heard a violent rush, as if something darted forward from another path that issued from an opposite point of Hartland valley, and passed under the oak. But who shall speak his feelings when in another instant he beheld in that part of the way beyond the oak which lay in the full light of an unclouded moon, a figure, tall and cloaked, mounted on a horse that bore his rider with fury towards the Abbey gates?

Now, whether it was that Tom Wakeum, who was really as bold as a lion in any moment of real danger, urged on his own steed to overtake the other, or whether, as is often the case, the one horse in violent motion excited the other to set off, in emulation of his pace, we cannot say; but certain it is, Tom's old sluggish hunter did no sooner see the other animal dash on before him than he followed with like

speed, and came up to the Abbey just as the first runaway horse stopped before the gates and his rider fell from his back, as if spent and totally helpless.

Tom Wakeum leapt off his horse, ran to the assistance of the fallen man, and, as he bent over him, heard him exclaim, in a low voice of inward agony, 'The Lord have mercy on my soul!' He looked at the fallen rider more closely, and examined his face, as the moon shone direct upon it.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Tom, 'it is my master! Oh! sir, what has happened? Are you hurt?'

No answer was given. Tom left Sir John Fairland for a moment on the ground, flew to the gates, roused the house within, and in a few minutes his master was carried into the Abbey hall.

CHAPTER IX.

Thus o'er the dying lamp th' unsteady flame
Hangs quivering on the point, leaps off by fits,
And falls again, as loth to quit its hold.—*Addison*.

SIR JOHN FAIRLAND was removed from the hall to his own chamber, and laid gently on the bed. He was not dead, though speechless. A servant, mounted on the swiftest horse, was instantly despatched to summon the attendance of Mr. Tournequet, a young surgeon, who lived not very far off in the adjoining parish. In about half an hour he arrived.

It appeared that Sir John had received a wound in the breast from a pistol shot, and in his paralytic habit (for not very long before he had had a slight seizure), either by the exhaustion arising from internal flow of blood, or from the shock the nerves had sustained, probably in some struggle, before he had been fired at in the forest, loss of speech was the consequence.

Mr. Tournequet extracted the ball, and a part of the wadding which stuck in the waistcoat, and had not penetrated the skin. Both the ball and the wadding the surgeon wrapped up with care, and put them into his own pocket, without making the slightest remark to any one present. He next desired to speak with Lady Fairland.

Her demonstrations of grief and anxiety were loud and excessive to such a degree that she would scarcely hear a word the surgeon had to say. Nevertheless, he compelled her to understand him, when he told her that no time should be lost in sending for the children of Sir John, who, the servants had informed him, were absent; for so great was the internal flow of blood, that the danger was imminent. He had done—he would do—all he could; but it was impossible he could say how long Sir John might survive; perhaps till the morning, perhaps not to the end of the present hour.

Lady Fairland having heard all he had to say, directed Tom Wakeum to go off in search of the party who were at the harvest home. But Tom

resolutely, sturdily refused to leave his master, declaring that Heaven itself had called upon him that night to go home; and that home he would not quit so long as his master should be alive. Lady Fairland knew well how impracticable a person Tom Wakeum was, and that it was in vain to argue a point with him when he had once made up his mind, she therefore despatched another servant.

Sir John Fairland retained his senses perfectly, and by the motion of his head and hands, as well as by his earnest and expressive looks, made himself tolerably well understood. On his wife saying to him, in a cheering tone, that she was sure he would recover, and that he knew how distressed she felt on his account, he shook his head, and, as well as he could, motioned her to leave him. He then looked imploringly at the surgeon, as much as to say, 'Take her away from me.'

The surgeon urgently recommended Lady Fairland to retire, and leave Sir John to his care, and that of his faithful servant. But her ladyship, in a haughty and indignant manner, refused to quit the room, and,

turning to Sir John, resumed the whining tone, and said, as she adjusted his pillows (for he had risen up in the bed with the help of Tom Wakeum), 'I am sure, my dear Sir John, if he could speak, would not have me leave him for all the world. And, indeed, I could not do so, for when he was in health I made him promise me, and I promised him, if either of us was taken ill, the one should never leave the other for a moment ; and I certainly shall not think of breaking my word. You would not wish me—I know you would not wish me—to leave you, my dear husband ; indeed, I cannot go !'

Sir John turned away his head, as if in disgust, and fixed his eyes with an expression of great earnestness on the face of Tom Wakeum.

'What would you have, Sir John—what can I do for you, my dear master ?' enquired Tom. 'Only make me to know what you want and I'll get it, though it be at the risk of my life. I have long loved and served you ; you have always been a good master to me, and I won't desert you now at anybody's bidding, be it who it may.' In speaking the last words with

his accustomed bluntness, he looked Lady Fairland directly in the face.

Sir John took Tom's hand, and by a feeble pressure seemed to acknowledge how sensibly he felt his fidelity, and his affectionate zeal. He then looked straight forward, and pointed to his *escritoire* that stood opposite the foot of his bed.

'Master wants something out of his *scritoire*,' said Tom Wakeum, 'I'm sure he does. Don't you, Sir John?'

Sir John moved his head, as if in assent to the question.

'Nonsense,' said Lady Fairland; 'to think of disturbing a dying man about the contents of his *escritoire*!'

'But I would suggest, Madam,' said the surgeon, 'that there may be papers in it of the highest importance. These Sir John Fairland may wish to place in some trusty hands for the benefit of his children. I would strongly advise the *escritoire* being opened, and every drawer in it also, till Sir John makes a sign which drawer he would have brought to him.'

Sir John bowed his head, as if in approval of what the surgeon had said.

‘Nonsense!’ again exclaimed Lady Fairland. ‘You will kill my husband with thus disturbing him. I will not have the *escritoire* touched.’

‘But it shall be touched though and by me,’ said Tom Wakeum, seeing the earnest and imploring manner in which, with hands and eyes, Sir John motioned and looked towards the *escritoire*. In the extremity of his anxiety he even made an effort to get out of bed; but he fell back in the struggle, as Lady Fairland, with an affectation of kindness, placed her hands upon him to keep him in.

Tom flew to the *escritoire*—Sir John watched his movements with looks of intense interest. Tom made effort on effort to force it open; he even shook it till every drawer within rattled; but the locks were too firmly set; they defied him. He then declared that he would break it open, and ran to the chimney to take up the poker, when the door of the apartment was thrown open, and in stalked Graves. He looked

pale, but cool and undismayed by the shocking scene before him.

No sooner did Sir John set his eyes on Graves than his features worked convulsively : and he made the most dreadful contortions in the vain effort to speak. His looks, his gestures, were expressive of the utmost horror ; they seemed even to indicate a disordered state of mind ; and once more he would, if he could, have started from his bed. Tom Wakeum and the surgeon exchanged looks.

Tom quitted the escritoire ; one thought now alone possessed him. ‘Oh ! sir,’ he exclaimed, ‘speak !—speak but one word, if you can—or make some sign by which we may understand you. Who is your murderer ? *Is that the man ?*’

‘Scoundrel !’ cried Graves, ‘leave this chamber—instantly leave it—or I will drag you from it by the throat.’

‘Two must go to that,’ said Tom, coolly,—‘you to do it, and me to let you do it. But you ben’t worth my notice now. Oh ! Sir John (turning again to his master), do make something like a sign that we

may know the man, and as there be a God above, I swear I will see justice done for the deed, though I should spend my last drop of blood to get it. Make but some sign !'

Sir John Fairland, who from extreme weakness had sunk back on his pillows, endeavoured to raise himself once more, but he could not. He next tried to raise his hand: it dropt like lead upon the bed-clothes. Overcome by agony of mind and by the exertions he had made at the sight of Graves, his last moments were hurried on. The death-rattle seized him, his countenance changed to a dull white ; he glared with an expression of horror on Graves, and in a few seconds the last struggles were over, and he sunk into the arms of death.

'Close down his eyes,' said Lady Fairland, who was bending over him—'how they glare ! I cannot bear it.' And she instantly quitted the chamber.

Scarcely had Sir John Fairland breathed his last when his son Charles and his sisters returned to the Abbey, in a state of the utmost dismay. They had arrived too late to have the consolation of seeing their

unfortunate father once more alive ; and the dreadful nature of his death, with the circumstances of his last moments, every particular of which was related either by Tom Wakeum or the surgeon, aggravated their distress almost to distraction.

By the advice of the surgeon, a sensible and spirited young man, who had seen much and suspected more, Charles put his seal on the lock of the escritoire before he left the apartment.

He gazed affectionately on his poor father's remains, and after his sisters had done the same and kissed the cold lips of their unfortunate parent, he caused them to be removed scarcely in a state of consciousness from the chamber of death. So fearfully sudden had been the event, that they could hardly yet realise that their father had been murdered.

On the next day the first step taken by the son was to obtain an inquest. The coroner, the jury (composed of the first gentlemen the country round could produce), and many others from far and near, crowded to the Abbey with offers of service to the young

baronet, now Sir Charles Fairland, on an occasion of such deep public as well as private interest.

Many witnesses were called, and the inquest was ably conducted by an acute and upright coroner. So minute and searching was the examination that it occupied three successive days.

The escritoire was opened by order of the coroner, and carefully searched. Nothing was found in it of any importance, except five hundred pounds, which it seemed Sir John had received not long before on account of the arrears of interest on some mortgage, and of his midsummer rents, as many of his tenants paid quarterly.

Mr. Richard Graves was very closely examined, and even Lady Fairland did not escape the shrewd cross-questioning of the coroner. But nothing appeared against either. Nor did anything come out in evidence to throw any light upon the mystery, except that there had been in the neighbourhood a desperate gang of smugglers, who had hitherto carried on their nefarious traffic with great daring and success.

They had been known to run their boats and conceal cargoes in Hartland Cove, close in shore, and not very far from the Abbey. Some kegs of brandy had been left behind them when disturbed on some occasions by the revenue officers; and these had been found among the rocks by Sir John Fairland's people about a fortnight before.

Since that discovery, the late Sir John having lost some heads of deer, issued warrants, as a magistrate, for the detention of three or four men strongly suspected as belonging to the gang of smugglers and deer-stalkers. They usually dwelt in huts near the sea-shore, and passed only for poor fishermen. Many persons were brought forward who deposed to various little circumstances (such as one of these men having been heard to say with an oath that he would send out a warrant for Sir John Fairland before Sir John could catch him), which when put together led to the very probable suspicion, that these daring men (and none were more cruel or reckless than the smugglers and wreckers on the North Coast) had waylaid Sir

John when returning unattended from the house of a friend. The jury long deliberated, and at last brought in a verdict, in consequence of which warrants were issued for the apprehension of James Wilson, Robert Williams, and Thomas Brent, on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Sir John Fairland.

After the inquest was concluded, Sir Charles waited on his stepmother concerning the funeral. He was much astonished on being told that, by a will the old baronet had some time since executed, herself and Mr. Richard Graves were appointed his executors. After the interment, she said, his family should hear the will. All things considered, and to avoid that crowd which the great publicity of his death was likely to attract, she had determined to bury the deceased in the old chapel attached to Hartland Abbey; and not to remove the body so far away as to the family vault in the church of the parish of Northleigh.

Sir Charles was, indeed, surprised; but all remonstrance proved vain; not a word he said was heeded,

and from that day till the hour arrived in which, as chief mourner, he was to follow his father's remains to the chapel, he neither saw nor sought his step-mother or her fellow executor, but purposely kept apart from them, devoting himself to the consolation of his afflicted sisters.

One piece of advice, which was thus given by Tom Wakeum, he most strictly adopted: 'Sir, I don't believe the scritoire of old master is half searched yet. I do think there were some gimcracks of holes and drawers in it that the *crowner* and the gentlemen of the jury didn't go deep enough to find out, for I don't believe one bit that it was the five hundred pounds, as madam makes out, found in the scritoire, tho' a heavy sum, that made poor dear master so cruel disturbed to get at his scritoire when he was on his death-bed. But you had better let my lady and her chum think you are satisfied it was so. However, do you seal it up again, and one day when you are all alone by yourself have a hunt over it, and see carefully if all the drawers have been opened and examined; and as it is a delicate sort of a piece of

furniture, if you can't easily get at 'um, take the poker.'

Sir Charles Fairland took his seal ring from his hand, and very carefully sealed up again every lock of the escritoire.

CHAPTER X.

A glorious remnant of the Gothic pile
(While yet the church was Rome's) stood half apart.

* * * * *

But in the noontide of the moon, and when
The wind is winged from one point of Heaven,
There moans a strange unearthly sound, which then
Is musical—a dying accent driven
Through the huge arch, which soars and sinks again ;
Some deem it but the distant echo given
Back to the night wind by the waterfall,
And harmonized by the old choral wall.—*Byron.*

THE last painful scene was still to be gone through. Sir Charles Fairland prepared to meet it with seeming fortitude ; as on the day of the funeral, he had not only his own spirits, but those of his sisters' to support ; for at the date of our narrative it was the inconsiderate, if not the unfeeling, custom to expect the attendance of the nearest female relatives as well as the male on such an occasion. The

daughters of the deceased, therefore, were to be present in the chapel.

The circumstances of Sir John Fairland's death had excited so much interest in the neighbourhood, and were so much the public talk, that it was apprehended a very great concourse of people—notwithstanding the comparative privacy of burying in the chapel—would be collected to witness the ceremony. As a further means of insuring privacy, therefore, the two executors changed the hour of interment, and directed that it should take place at night with no more state than was absolutely indispensable.

The evening of the appointed time set in with a melancholy presage. The ocean was in gloom, gleams of a pale, cold light were seen upon it, and the gathering clouds begun to lower. The sun had set over the valley of Hartland, and the woods gradually darkened around, as the tenants and the few persons invited to attend the solemnity arrived at the Abbey, habited in long cloaks and scarves of black.

It was between the hours of nine and ten in the evening, when the mourning train issued from the

gates to cross the court that led to the ancient chapel within whose consecrated precincts the interment was to take place. The procession was certainly impressive. The servants of the household walked first, two and two, each bearing a lighted torch. Next came the officials of the ceremony, with banners and achievements. The coffin followed, covered with a black velvet pall that was supported by eight neighbouring gentlemen. Immediately after walked Sir Charles Fairland, as chief mourner, followed by such other male mourners as were akin to the deceased. The deeply-afflicted daughters came next, with the females of the household. Lady Fairland, however, was not present; she was said to be greatly indisposed. The tenants and inferior servants closed the train. Such was the pomp of the time, that this, though including more than seventy persons in attendance, was deemed a very small funeral for a man of Sir John Fairland's rank and fortune.

There was something peculiarly solemn and impressive in the ceremony and its accompaniments. The chapel had been neglected for many years. An

interment had not, perhaps, taken place in it since the dissolution of the Abbey at the Reformation. From time and disuse the walls were damp, and in some places moss-grown. The roof was in bad condition ; the clustered columns that supported it, and formed the division of the aisles, were here and there twisted with ivy, and many of the capitals broken and partially fallen from want of repair ; whilst the vaulted and richly fretted roof itself had afforded a shelter to the bats and the night birds, which, now disturbed in their 'solitary reign,' darted from their abode, and flew about on agitated wings above the heads of the mourning train. Many of the windows were without glass, or retained it only in fragments. The great east window, however, was tolerably perfect, and still exhibited by day those deep and glowing hues that were once the pride of Gothic art in buildings sacred to Christian devotion.

The whole of the interior looked dark and dreary, and as the torches threw strong but partial gleams of light on pillar, vault, and arch, they did but render more distinct the ruin and neglect into which the

chapel had been suffered to fall, and increased the awe that accompanied its decay. Through the broken windows might be both seen and heard the lofty and aged trees that grew without, waving in the night breeze, and murmuring dirge-like sounds, as if to add their voice of wailing to the circumstances and solemnity of the hour.

As Sir Charles Fairland passed under the Gothic portal that gave entrance to the chapel, he shuddered. The gloom before him, not yet dispelled by the slowly advancing torch-bearers, had in it something of mystery apt to raise in the mind presages akin to superstitious fear. Such a scene of obscurity, and desolation, struck him to the heart, and the thought arose in him that it was a fit resting-place for the murdered—a murdered father, whose destroyer was yet undetected, and his blood unavenged. The grave was to the left, beneath the east window, and near the altar of the chapel. Immediately above the excavated spot, within a niche of the wall, stood the ancient carved figure of St. Nectan, the Martyr, to whom the chapel was dedicated. The martyr, in

the attitude of expiring by a violent death, with raised head and hands, seemed to be calling on Heaven to witness and avenge his murder.

The figure, the attitude, the coincidence, was not lost on Sir Charles Fairland ; he felt a chill of horror run through his veins, as he again and again thought of his father's fate ; and as the words, ' Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,' were being pronounced whilst the corpse was lowered into the ground, he breathed a secret and impassioned vow that he would leave no means unattempted to bring the murderer to justice.

All was ended ; he cast one look of deep interest upon the coffin ere the earth covered it for ever, and then retreated from the scene in silence and in fear, supporting his weeping sisters, and vainly endeavouring to appear calm, lest he should aggravate their affliction ; nor would he that night hear the will which was offered to be read to him. He could do no more than request the friends who had come far and late to pay the last sad duty of respect to his father, to refresh themselves and remain till the morning at the

Abbey. Few, however, accepted the invitation, and the old house was soon left to a darkness and a silence like that of the tomb.

We will not trouble the reader with a full recital of the will of Sir John Fairland. It was such as might have been expected from the date it bore; it was made at the time when the two executors, Lady Fairland and Graves, were at the height of their ill-gotten ascendancy over the mind of Sir John, and whilst using their utmost art and malice, and the most cruel system of falsehood, to poison his mind against the children of his first marriage; more especially his eldest son Charles.

There is nothing more easy than by telling a true tale falsely, distorting some facts, and passing over others unnoticed, to make the innocent appear the guilty to a prejudiced mind; and this was the course which the conspirators—for such they were—had adopted in their misrepresentations about his children with Sir John Fairland. It is almost needless to add, that the circumstances to which we have alluded occurred some time previous to that

eventful interview between father and son, which ended in a manner so satisfactory to both, as far as their feelings and convictions for each other were concerned.

The principal points in the will were these :—Only five hundred pounds were bequeathed to each of the three daughters of the first marriage. All the most valuable estates (none being entailed) were left to Abraham, then a boy at school, the son of the second marriage. To his sister Elizabeth was given three thousand pounds, and to Mr. Richard Graves, for his trouble as executor, one thousand pounds ; to Lady Fairland, ten thousand pounds, with (this was, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary clauses ever heard of in a will) all the personal effects of ‘whatsoever kind or description’ that might happen to be contained in Lady Fairland’s chamber, commonly called the *Watchet Chamber*, at the time of the testator’s decease. And to Charles John Fairland, the eldest son, was left all the remainder of the estate, both real and personal, as the residuary legatee.

This sounded well ; but, on examination, it was

apparent that the bequest had been made merely for the sake of appearance in the eye of the world ; for the residue proved to be nothing more than the worst of all the landed estates, a very small, poor farm, and about fifteen hundred pounds in money, with all the old pictures, worm-eaten books, tables, and chairs, and beds, that had been removed to Hartland Abbey, and did not happen to be placed in Lady Fairland's chamber at the time of Sir John's decease.

All comments on such a will are needless ; the whole country cried shame, and some of Sir Charles's friends advised him to dispute it, in a court of law. But honest Lawyer Noland shook his head at this piece of advice, and told Sir Charles that, unjust as the will might be, it was legally drawn and without a flaw. Abraham, though a younger son, was legitimate, and as Sir John was in his perfect senses, and in sound health in every way at the date of the instrument ; as he had also been heard to threaten with disinheritance his eldest in favour of his second son, he feared nothing but the loss of the little

property Sir Charles might possess, in an expensive lawsuit, would be the result of an appeal to a court for justice. Counsel's opinion was taken, and being given to the same effect, all thoughts of any legal steps to set aside the will were abandoned.

The unfortunate young baronet, half broken-hearted at the sense of the injury he had sustained, remained fully convinced that after the memorable interview he had with his father but just before his death, had he not died so suddenly and by such foul means, the discoveries he had made about his wife and Graves would have caused him to make another will, and one of a very different nature. He determined, in the bitterness of his disappointment, to sell the paltry estate left to him, to remove what might be his by his residuary legateeship, to demand the payment of the five hundred pounds for each of his sisters, and the fifteen hundred for himself, and then with as little delay as possible to quit Hartland Abbey for ever.

He also consented, as it was their wish, to leave his sisters under the care of Mrs. Elford, with whose

small means they desired to unite their own, and so to live altogether under the same roof, at least for the present. For Sir Charles himself, as his beloved Isabella was willing to share with him his broken fortunes, he proposed that they should unite their hands in marriage, leave England, and retire to an obscure part of the Continent till such time as he could enter upon some honourable employment, in the hope by his own exertions to raise those means which were denied him in right of his family, his birth, and his expectations.

This plan Sir Charles attempted putting into practice ; but obstacles and delays were still thrown in his way by his father's executors, and it was whilst smarting under these vexations, that the following scene occurred at Hartland.

‘ Mr. Graves,’ said Sir Charles, with warmth, ‘ I am glad I have encountered you, in order to repeat that demand which my solicitor, Mr. Noland, has already made in my name and in the names of my sisters, the payment of the paltry pittance which you and our stepmother suffered my father to bequeath to

us. We wish for immediate payment ; and, sir, it will be your interest to comply with our request, as we shall then trouble you no more. I ask this with temper ; do not drive me to extremities, to force from you a compliance with our just demands.'

'Sir Charles,' said Graves, 'this is very strange language. Lady Fairland is an executor as well as myself, and she must be consulted. The law allows an executor more time ; we cannot be hurried.'

'Do not talk to me of what the law allows,' replied Sir Charles, indignantly ; 'for if justice had its course, where would you stand at this hour ? where the woman who is at once your confederate and your destined prey ?'

Sir Charles looked Graves full in the face as he spoke this in a high and impassioned tone. The villain quailed before the searching eye of the injured son, as truth in the accents of irritated feeling burst from his lips. Graves trembled, for a moment the colour left his cheeks, and his whole countenance turned to an ashy whiteness as he stammered forth :
'Sir Charles Fairland, I do not understand behaviour


such as this. If we delay paying you and your sisters your fortune, it is for your benefit, and for that of the young ladies. We find that you are about to enter into a very imprudent marriage as soon as you are paid; and as for your sisters, Lady Fairland thinks that for the present they will be much better under our protection than any other.'

'Do not,' exclaimed Sir Charles, 'do not profane the name of my injured sisters by even hinting at such guardianship for them as that of yourself and Lady Fairland. I can read your purpose; you grudge even the paltry bequest that is made to them. You protect them! Lady Fairland protect them! As soon would I commit their innocence to the keeping of the vilest wretch, who makes a traffic of the innocent, as I would leave them in such foul and guilty hands as those of yourself and your paramour, the widow of my poor deceived father!'

'Sir,' said Graves; 'sir, this is beyond endurance. I—I shall demand satisfaction for such slanders cast on me and on my honourable mistress.'

‘Demand it, and take it,’ replied Sir Charles; ‘the satisfaction of facing me in a court of justice, where slander may be traced to its true source. But think not that, in defiance of the laws of God and man, I would peril my life to fight with a low-born villain. Sir, I am a gentleman by birth and education, though you, by your arts, have scarcely left me the means to be such in fortune. Nor would I do my poor sisters so great an injury as to hazard my own life, and thus to leave them exposed to your and Lady Fairland’s protection!—protection that would be such as the fiends give their victims, whom they serve only to destroy. But I will no longer bandy words with you, who have neither honour nor shame. Answer me this—Will you, or will you not, comply with my demand?’

‘Do you first answer me, Sir Charles,’ said Graves, with an impertinent air, ‘and tell me by what authority your servant, that insolent Tom Wakeum, has this morning been directing, aiding, and abetting the loading of sundry carts with some of the old family portraits and other matters belonging to the



late Sir John Fairland, and removing the same from this Abbey to the house of your attorney ?’

‘I remove these matters,’ said Sir Charles, ‘because I have a right to them and a respect for them. They are principally the portraits of my forefathers ; and you and Lady Fairland have left me little else to show that I am well descended. And more than this, I would preserve even the very shades of my ancestors from keeping house with those who have combined to bring ruin, as far as they could do it, on the elder-born descendant of their blood. My friend, Mr. Noland, will receive and hold them for me in safe keeping for the present ; they are mine by right.’

‘By right, Sir Charles,’ said Graves, scarcely knowing what he said, ‘how by right ?’

‘Oh ! Mr. Graves, by the right of that residuary legateeship which you and my stepmother so kindly permitted my father to bestow on me.’

‘Sir Charles,’ said Graves, in his confusion contradicting himself, ‘you do me great injustice. I do not dispute the right of that residue, which you so much despise, and by which all the personalities of

this Abbey will be yours, all except the contents of one chamber.'

'Oh! sir, I know it; all except the contents of the Watchet Chamber; and as Lady Fairland there keeps all the plate and jewels, and whatever is of most value, I am most exceedingly obliged by the exception. I had not forgotten that part of the plot.'

'Nor have I forgotten, Sir Charles,' said Graves, boldly, 'that when I passed your door just now I heard your servant, Tom Wakeum, giving orders to some of your people to remove the escritoire that was Sir John Fairland's; that, Sir Charles, belonged to the Watchet Chamber. It was only moved out of it, by the request of Sir John, a week or so before his death; it may, therefore, be considered as belonging to it. I, as executor, shall detain the escritoire.'

'At your peril do so; at your peril lay but a finger upon it. That escritoire was in my father's own apartment at the time of his death; it is now mine, and I will keep it. I shall remove it from this house, and no man shall hinder me.'

‘We will see how that matter goes,’ said Graves. ‘Sir Charles, this is a fresh injury to the widow of your father.’

‘Talk not of my injuring the widow of my father,’ said Sir Charles, passionately. ‘Oh! too well did he know the fatal truth; too late did he learn to know the woman who had been as the blight and the deadly blast to the fair promise of his children, till, grown bold and confident in sin, she brought beneath his roof a villain worse, were it possible, even than herself, to destroy the peace, the sanctity, the security of his home! And now that villain dares to brave his eldest son, the heir of little more than his injuries and his name.’

Graves stood riveted to the spot, unable either to answer or to retreat from these impassioned reproaches. For although Sir Charles was of a generous and forgiving nature, yet, when smarting under the stings of such insolent treatment, his mind became inflexible, and he resolved at every risk to accomplish the objects he had in view.

Graves had made a great mistake in his estimate

of the young baronet's character when he fancied, because he had seen him little more than passive under the most cruel neglect, that the ease and good-nature of his disposition indicated weakness of mind. The truth now flashed upon him, and he felt how unequal he was to cope with so spirited an adversary. But Graves was hardened in iniquity, and every just, reproachful word cast upon him did but provoke his malice, till at length, maddened by the scorn and the taunts of Sir Charles, and angry with himself that he knew not how to retort, he stood trembling with impotent rage, as his eye glanced upon his opponent with fiendish vindictiveness.

‘My father knew you both,’ continued Sir Charles ; ‘aye, both, though unhappily not long before his death. He knew your wiles, detected your machinations, and that between you you had made his honour your sport. He knew this. But my own suspicions are of more fearful import. Most vehemently do I suspect that you obtained some knowledge of the discoveries he had made and of his purpose to discard the false wife from his bosom and the false steward from

his house, and that you anticipated his just resentment, and prevented it. Aye, sir, scowl upon me, raise the hand and clench it ; I care not. Truth is great, and will at last prevail. I do suspect that my father had foul play, and by your means ! If I am wrong in my suspicions, may my sin be forgiven in the greatness of the provocation ; but if right, may God yet bring the hidden thing to light ! And may the murderer of my father quail before the eye of public justice, as you, sir, aye you, now quail before mine.'

Sir Charles Fairland turned away as he spoke, and left Graves fixed on the spot with the characters of terror impressed on every feature of his face.

CHAPTER XI.

But soft, behold ! lo, where it comes again !
I'll cross it, though it blast me—stay, illusion;
If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
Speak to me !

Shakespeare.

‘VERY foolish,’ said Lawyer Noland, as Sir Charles Fairland related to him, almost immediately after it had taken place, the particulars of this stormy interview with Graves. ‘Very foolish, indeed, on your part, to let your angry passions thus run away with you. My dear boy, you should have preserved the utmost calmness with Graves ; you should have been civil to him. I fear that by your vehemence—even as you tell me was the case with your poor father in his scheme to detect Graves—I fear you will spoil all, spoil the snare that I am spreading to catch the villain ; and that he may be off, instead of walking into it. My plot works capitally ; I have

my men on the look-out everywhere. The revenue officers are also in my interest ; they hate Graves for having certainly protected some of those desperate smugglers, and, as it is reported, for having supplied them with powder and shot to make that bold stand when one of the revenue men was killed the other day in the fray on the beach.* Strong motives must a man of Mr. Graves' position and expectations have—for all men say he boasts that he is to marry your Lady Fairland—strong must be his motives for protecting a gang of smugglers so desperate as these ; but more of this anon. That escritoire must be moved to-night. I must have the searching of that myself, with your leave.'

'I fear Graves will gain possession of it,' replied Sir Charles. 'I am most desirous that it should be searched by you. How must it be moved?'

'I will tell you,' said Noland ; 'I will send one of my own people ; he shall go for it with my

* At the date of this tale the nefarious traffic of smuggling was carried on, both on the coasts of Devon and Cornwall, with the most extraordinary daring.

cart. That will take Graves by surprise, and Tom Wakeum can help to remove it. No time must be lost ; for, like you, I think there is something suspicious in Graves so insisting on retaining it, and your father's anxiety to come at it in his dying moments confirms the suspicion. There must be something of vast importance connected with that old escritoire.'

'Yet I can assure you,' replied Sir Charles, 'that except the five hundred pounds, which the coroner handed over to the executors after the inquest, there was nothing of any value in it.'

'Nevertheless,' said Mr. Noland, 'I advise its being secured and searched. I will give orders about it forthwith ; the men and the cart shall go off for it directly. The portraits are all safely arrived ; a goodly set of grandfathers. Come with me, my dear fellow, and I'll show you where I've stowed them ; and then you shall go with me to my closet, where I will lay before you some notes that I have made of this affair of the smugglers—they contain a few curious discoveries ; and the plan I have drawn out for our

further proceedings ; that is, unless you have marred all by this foolish quarrel, and, as I said but now, the scoundrel sets off before I can catch him. But, after all, I think the bait up at the Abbey—the widow and the gold—is too strong to be lost sight of by such a shark.’

‘I know not what to think,’ said Sir Charles, musing, as if engaged more with his own thoughts than with the plans of his friend.

‘What to think !’ said the lawyer, taking up his last words in a cheerful tone ; ‘why, Sir Charles, always think the best and hope the best. But come, cheer up ; you are in low spirits. Never mind the dark hour of fortune ; it will be bright by-and-by. You must stay and cut your mutton with me to-day ; a delicate leg of Okehampton with a bottle of old Tokay to give it a relish, and we will drink a health to the fair Miss Isabella and better times to us all. I shall never forget the day when I first heard of your being thought of before you were born from the lips of your poor distressed mother, and how on that day I helped to make the peace and to prevent a

separation. But now do I earnestly hope I may, at last, effect a divorce between your father's lands and his second wife's children. But no more of this now ; come along with me. I have hope. But if all goes wrong, and things come to the worst, we must even take patience to help us.'

So saying, Mr. Noland led the way. Long and deep was the conference. Sir Charles and his adviser were closeted for more than three hours, and finally called in to their counsels a very intelligent officer of the revenue, who was to play an important part in their proposed measures. In the interval we will, in a few words, tell the result of Mr. Noland's scheme for the removal of the *escritoire*.

A rascally footman, a well-paid tool of Graves, soon made his master acquainted with the arrival of a cart and only one man with it, who with the assistance of Tom Wakeum had placed the *escritoire* safe in the same cart, adding that Tom had afterwards set off with a letter which Sir Charles strictly charged him to deliver himself into the hands of Miss Fitzwarren.

Graves thus ascertained that the man and the cart were ready for departure, and that Tom Wakeum was off his post. Now it so happened that Mr. Graves, for purposes of his own, was removing some of his personal effects to a small house he had recently taken in the neighbourhood. Some said he did this for appearance, that he might not live under the same roof with Lady Fairland till his marriage entitled him so to do. Be this as it may, he bethought himself of a scheme to obtain possession of the escritoire ; for he, like Sir Charles, entertained a strong suspicion that it must be something of more importance than the 500*l.* deposited therein, which had so disturbed the dying moments of his late patron. He was therefore quite as anxious as Lawyer Noland himself, though from a very different motive, to enter on a search. Determined to take decisive steps in the affair, he gave instructions to his informer to invite the man, who had the charge of the cart, to drink before he departed with his load, and vowed, that if his emissary did not make the fellow drunk on the spot, he would discharge

him for a bungler before the next morning. The rogue went willingly enough to do his master's bidding ; whilst Graves lost no time in summoning to his secret counsels another of his agents, and one of a suspicious kind, who was in attendance at the moment. What was then the nature of the conference it is not here necessary to relate ; it will be known in due time and place ; but for the present we must turn to a scene of a very different description in the progress of our narrative.

Towards the evening of the same day in which these matters occurred, a man of a short, stout figure, a steady and determined countenance, plainly habited in a thick grey surtout, was seen lingering about the coast near Hartland rocks. Every now and then he applied to his eye a telescope, such as are frequently carried by naval officers when walking the deck of their vessels. He was evidently on the look-out. After a while he proceeded to Hartland Point, that bold projection of headland which, as we have before noticed, was called by Ptolemy *The Promontory of Hercules*. The ascent to

it, like that of Tintagel in Cornwall, is by a very narrow pass, extremely steep and rugged. The wind was violent as the person we have named ascended; but after he had with much difficulty reached the summit, he found it calm on the point.* On this spot was already laid a quantity of wood and dried furze, as if ready to be lighted for a beacon.


This great and bold promontory of the north coast stretches itself into the sea, and is united to the land by a causeway, narrow, broken, and so steep, in parts as to be almost perpendicular. The angry and reverberating waves beat on either side, close to its very base. It is at once an object of terror and sublimity; to a depth that makes the brain dizzy, the eye looks down upon splintered

* 'This calm on the summit of the point is occasioned by the wind striking against it being thrown upwards, so as to form an arch overhead, defending it, as it were, from the horizontal current. This was proved by our throwing over some chips which happened to be on the spot, and which, instead of descending, though thrown with strength, ascended with a rotatory motion above our heads in the form of a curve.'—From MS. notes of a tour on the North coast of Devon and Cornwall by the late Reverend E. A. Bray.

and sharp points of rocks that rise up below like spear-heads.

The coast around is of the noblest character : long and far-extending, composed of cliffs of the wildest and most romantic forms, and here and there intersected with many a nook and cove ; in some places lines of low black rock, and the surge breaking over or covering them with sheets of foam, as the tide rolls in with irresistible force, produces a striking effect both on the eye and ear.

The ocean, when seen from this headland, is an object of extraordinary grandeur, the horizon having the appearance of great elevation, the whole sweep of the mighty belt so simple, yet so sublime in its simplicity, an image of power living and moving and full of awe. On the evening of which we speak it was silvered by partial lights, and here and there overcast by the deepest shadows. On the ledges of the surrounding cliffs, perched on their points, were many of those wild birds which, cradled in the rocks and nursed amid the storms, become familiarised with the ocean. Others soared high, and presented their white and airy forms



with outspread wings in contrast to the dark and angry clouds, 'fast gathering round both sea and shore.'

The man with the telescope stopped on the summit of Hartland Point, and took a careful survey in every direction, and then closed the instrument. Indeed, the gathering twilight would not have allowed it to be of use much longer. Somewhat distant from the shore appeared a small vessel whose white and swelling sail was labouring to waft her through a turbulent and rolling sea.


No sooner did the man on the look-out perceive her than he took flint and steel from his pocket, and ere the rain which threatened could fall to prevent his purpose struck a light and fired the beacon. The flame rose brightly without being even in the slightest degree blown from its upward direction, for not a breath of the wind, that was rushing violently above, touched it.

A faint cry arose from the vessel below, and was heard by the man who fired the beacon in a momentary pause of the blast. The cry seemed to be taken

for an answer to his signal; he at once commenced his retreat, and with a slow and labouring step, often compelled to stand still till some sudden gust had passed and allowed him to go forward, he made his way over the narrow causeway which unites the promontory with the mainland.

The sun now set, and the twilight of a summer sky was rendered dull and heavy by the gathering storm. The edges of the clouds, tinged with reflected light, were of a fiery red, the ocean became every moment more and more agitated, and the breakers made all the shore one sheet of boiling foam. The high and impending cliffs, darkened by the sombrous clouds, sent forth hollow moans or shrill sounds from the force of the winds among them, whilst the lofty woods of Hartland and the deep and rocky recesses that lay around the valley were half hidden in the obscurity of the hour.

This was succeeded by a night of rapid and striking change. At one moment all was total darkness, and the next, as the fast-scudding clouds passed away from the moon's disc and left her



unclouded in her majestic course, her light silvered the tops of the forest trees, and showed distinctly the antiquated and clustered towers of the Abbey standing loftily above them, in some parts illumined with partial splendour, in others wrapped in night and gloom.

Such was the scene and the hour, when there passed through the forest two men, the one mounted and the other on foot, leading by the head a horse which drew a small cart laden with something of bulk. For a while they continued their course in silence. They made a pause, however, as a deep and low peal of thunder rolled hollowly in the distance, indicating that the threatened storm was at length come. There was a momentary calm: this was followed by a strong and loud rush of the wind, as it swept along the woods and tossed high in the air the boughs and branches of the trees; whilst the open spaces that lay around became visible as the first vivid flash of lightning gleamed upon the ground.

‘I do not like this, James Wilson,’ said one.

of the men to his companion, 'nor the place we have to find, nor the errand we go upon. It's an awkward job if we are interrupted, and our men may want us, and wonder what keeps us away when there's a cargo to be run; they may want hands.'

'And a pretty night they have for running it in,' said the other; 'unless the boats are hove up in the cove, I would not give a button for the cargo; it will all go down to Davie Jones's locker. Our men will have a hard pull, I fancy, against wind, tide, and sea, to make the cove. I doubt if all goes well; but be it how it may, I wish I was with them; for I tell you, Bob, thof I'm no land-lubber, I don't like the place we have to pass—don't like it at all, nor the stories about it that go round the country. I wonder why I agreed to do to-night that fellow Graves' errand.'

'Why, because you could not let it alone; that's all,' said the other man to whom he thus freely spoke his doubts and fears. 'Graves out with his purse and showed you the chinkers, and *that* did the business.

Don't you grumble for the job, for you've had your pay before hand ; I've had only promises.'

'But he's always a crossing your palm with something better than coppers, Bob,' replied his associate. 'You're his man in constant pay, I'm not ; and I don't like such a job as this we are upon when we have to pass near that infernal oak in the forest.'

'Hush, hush !' said his companion ; 'the Abbot's Oak, you mean. Don't call it infernal, or the Evil One himself may come up to let you know he's ready to take what you call his.'

'I had rather see him there than what I hear tell of,' said James Wilson.

'The Spectre Horseman, you mean,' said Bob Williams. 'Why, man, that is because you are chicken-hearted, and a greenhorn. The Spectre Horseman is the best friend we have in the forest. He has stood guard over my kegs, I will warrant you, many a night, when we have left them in these woods, under the old oak tree ; well knowing, as we did, that not a mother's son of them, all the neighbourhood round, would dare go near the place

for their very lives. Not even a revenue man would go near it; he'd shake in his shoes like a man at the foot of the gallows if he did but come within pistol shot of the Abbot's Oak. But as for the thing itself, don't be afraid of it; the story's of no good whatever but, as I said before, to protect our kegs and contrabands.'

'Well, so you say,' replied Wilson; 'but that don't satisfy me.'

'Well, then, your own eyes will soon,' said Robert Williams, 'for we shall be at the Abbot's Oak in less than ten minutes, if the animal here will but put a better leg forward; he's got no such great weight to draw, to be so sluggish. But what a cruel night is this for our people!'

Again was the scene around involved in darkness, the clouds driving thickly before the face of the moon. With great difficulty the men made their way among broken and fallen branches, tall grass and brambles, and the high knotted roots of the trees that encumbered the narrow and little frequented path they were pursuing. Once the cart was nearly overturned;

and twice they paused, thinking they heard some one near at hand. At length the thunder, 'that deep and dreadful organ pipe,' burst over the forest in a peal so tremendous that it seemed to shake the very earth beneath their feet. The lightning gleamed, and then utter darkness fell again like a pall over the woods. The winds moaned in strong and awful cadence ; again and again did the heavens seem to open to send forth a stream of fire, and forked flashes quivered along the ground.

There was something very fearful in this rapid interchange of light and darkness. The men paused, as if overcome with awe by that sublime fury of the elements which is as 'a token of God directing His world.' Once more they endeavoured to make their way through the intricate path that was before them ; and slowly they drew near the decaying lord of the forest, the oak, which stood in sombre mystery, half seen and half obscured, as the stern and watchful guardian of the woods.

At this moment the moon was more in mist than in shadow ; a succession of thin vapoury clouds like a

veil, through which her orb could be distinctly seen, were scudding before her; there was obscurity, but not darkness. And whilst surrounding objects thus appeared somewhat in mist, the men—the one who led the horse by the head, and the other who rode near—were much startled by the led animal standing stock-still, shaking in every limb, as if in the agony of fear; whilst the other horse started with so much violence that he nearly threw his rider, then reared, then backed as much as he could from the pathway, and shook and foamed with terror.

Before the men could interchange a word, a figure seemingly taller than of human height, mounted on a horse of due proportion, passed rapidly before the oak; neither form nor feature could be distinctly seen. He wore a hat that appeared to be slouched over the face, which was turned towards them. He seemed to each of the men as if about to rush upon him, yet they were some distance apart from one another.

Wilson had resolution enough to speak; no answer

was returned, and in another second the phantom rider shot by the oak like an arrow from a bow.

‘Where is he gone?’ exclaimed Wilson.

‘To hell, from where he came,’ replied his ruffianly companion, ‘for not a living creature is now to be seen in the pathway down which he rode. Yet I could not see which way he turned ; did you ?’

‘No ; I did not.’

‘It must be the Spectre Horseman,’ said Williams.

‘But what noise was that ?’

They paused and listened. A low but shrill whistle was heard in an opposite quarter of the forest to where the mysterious horseman had appeared and disappeared.

‘We are trapped,’ said Williams ; ‘those are the revenue men, or I am much mistaken. They are on the look-out. Here, Wilson, mount behind me ; leave the horse and cart. The officers will fancy that the old lumbering piece of furniture it contains is a cargo of contrabands, they will fasten on it, and we shall gain time to get off. Here, give me your hand ; mount

quickly, for we shall have an old score to settle if we are caught. Mount and away.'

Wilson forthwith jumped up behind his friend ; and they set off at as hard a pace as the animal could be urged to by the repeated blows and kicks laid into his sides. Whilst the thunder and rain rolled and rattled above their heads a few of the revenue men. (stationed that night on the look-out purposely to intercept any of the smugglers passing through the forest) reached the fatal oak ; not, however, in time to secure the rogues for whom they were in search, but soon enough to take possession of the cart and the luggage it contained. This they did at once ; and how they disposed of it will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

Thou'st done an evil deed,
For sin is of the soul, and thine is tainted. *Maturin.*

LIKE our old friend harlequin, who in our childhood used so to raise our wonder and delight in the pantomimic scene, when by the wave of his marvellous wand he changed land and houses into sea and ships, we must claim a privilege no less fanciful, and at once transport our readers to an old house, not one so ancient or so picturesque as Hartland Abbey, yet quite old and curious enough for railroad tourists and sketching young ladies to visit and 'take off,' as the Devonians say, if it be still in being.

This house was the property of Charles Noland, Esq., attorney-at-law, and a very honest man. Mr. Noland, as we now introduce him, in its most spacious apartment, was seated in somewhat of that state in which we once before saw him on the expected separation between Sir John Fairland and his lady.

On the present occasion there was a solemnity about his manner and deportment that argued a case of high importance was in hand. Sir Charles Fairland, with three or four county magistrates, and several other gentlemen, were there assembled. The much-talked-of *escritoire* was there also, and the ancestors of Sir Charles, moved only a few days before to the custody of Mr. Noland, stood, some in armour and others in full-bottomed wigs, leaning in their frames against the wall, there having yet been no time nor place found to hang them : they seemed on this day to have met together to be the silent witnesses of a cause of the utmost importance to the last eldest-born heir of their honoured line.


The beadle and constable of the parish (both offices being filled by one and the same man) was present, several of the revenue people likewise, and others of less note. Certain men in custody were held apart in an outer chamber, and others ready to be produced in evidence before the magistrates as the circumstances of the enquiry might demand.

Mr. Noland rose and opened the case. His speech was long and weighty, every word and every sentence duly considered ; and whilst he addressed the magistrates, he every now and then assisted both his memory and his eloquence by reference to certain notes he had made for the purpose. The opening of the case occupied a full hour ; we shall only give the pith of it.

Mr. Noland began by stating that, in consequence of a certain deadly fray which took place on the beach near Hartland Cove, about six weeks before, in which a man named Robert Williams (assisted by others) had feloniously slain one of His Majesty's revenue officers, a warrant had been issued by the late Sir John Fairland to apprehend these persons, who were likewise suspected of being deer-stalkers, and of having killed many head of deer in Hartland Forest. Now it appeared by credible evidence that the afore-said Robert Williams, whilst somewhat off his guard, through the effects of drink, had dropped threatening words, intimating that he would despatch the late

Sir John Fairland ere he should be apprehended under the warrant which Sir John had issued for his detention.

Here Mr. Noland paused, and then, with a more solemn aspect than he had yet assumed, proceeded to say that it had pleased God, who bringeth every secret work into judgment, to make known the circumstances just related, yet but as the beginning of certain discoveries that had rapidly followed. He need not remind the magistrates present of what had taken place before the coroner on the inquest of the late lamented baronet, inasmuch as the documents of the whole of those proceedings were before them. He would only say—and here the worthy attorney paused and took snuff, to assist his modesty in sustaining the little compliment he was about to pay to himself—he would only add that ever since he had been employed on that memorable occasion he had used his most unremitting and zealous efforts to discover the perpetrators of the murder. Day and night had he thought with intense anxiety upon the most likely means of detection ; and he was both proud



and happy in being able to state that the measures he adopted met with the approbation of the magistrates, also the thanks of Sir Charles, and the attestation of his own conscience ; for he assured the gentlemen there present, that though for more than thirty years hackneyed in the ways of the law, he still possessed a conscience—it had been his best reward.

Again Mr. Noland paused ; and now he changed his attitude, and stood with the right leg a little forward, the left drawn back, his head raised, his notes in his left hand, and his right gracefully stuck in the bosom of his cut velvet waistcoat, between the top button-hole and the third from it—an attitude in which he had seen the celebrated Lord Chesterfield stand, in the House of Peers, as he uttered his famous tirade against Sir Robert Walpole when he seceded from his party. Ever since Mr. Noland had adopted the attitude in question when he wished to give peculiar force and effect to what he said.

He then proceeded to say that he had received information from an individual in his employ that a very large cargo of contraband spirits and goods was

to be landed at Hartland Cove, on the first stormy night, when it was considered the officers of the revenue would be less alert; that a certain signal was agreed upon to give notice of the precise time when this could be done with the greatest safety. For this purpose, a quantity of wood was to be set on fire on Hartland Point. This intelligence Mr. Noland ascertained to be correct, and deemed it of such importance that he lost no time in communicating with the officers of the revenue, and agreed with them to set a trap for the smugglers.

It was arranged on the first tempestuous day to withdraw all the revenue men from their posts, on the pretext that in such weather no smuggling boats would venture to run a cargo into the cove. Mr. Noland's informant gave him the hint that a good portion of the contrabands was to be taken to the Abbey for the service of Lady Fairland and Mr. Graves, who were long-established patrons of these men; having by their means drunk their claret and worn their foreign velvets and silks duty free.

In consequence of this information, and a well-

arranged plan of the revenue officers, on the evening of the previous day, the weather continuing to be stormy, the spy in their employ had been sent to light the beacon. The smugglers fell into the snare, landed the cargo, and were surprised in the very act of doing so by a strong armed force concealed amongst the rocks and hollows near the shore.

Further, in order to detect any persons of the said gang who might be in connection with anyone at the Abbey, it was arranged that a small party should be stationed at a certain point in the forest near the track that led to and from the coast. There the officers, in the first instance, failed in their plan, for two men belonging to the gang escaped ; but a cart and horse, and something they were feloniously removing—the same being the property of Sir Charles Fairland—had been secured, and the two fugitives, not knowing their associates were captured at the cove, and having gone forward to join them, fell into the hands of the revenue officers, and were now also in custody.

One of these, James Wilson, seeing how des-

perate matters stood with him, on the assurance that his life would be spared, offered to turn King's evidence respecting a very serious matter. In consequence of his deposition, taken before a magistrate, a warrant had been issued to arrest a certain person, whom he (Mr. Noland) now directed the constable to bring before the bench.

The worthy attorney sat down, took his hand from his bosom, wiped his face with his handkerchief, and seemed somewhat exhausted by the length and earnestness of his speech. A murmur of approbation ran through the room. All present seemed wrought to a high pitch of curiosity and expectation, that sank into the silence of astonishment, not unmixed with fear, when, the door being opened, Graves was brought in a prisoner, between the constable and two or three armed men who had assisted in the arrest.

On entering, Graves looked round him with an insolent and hardened air, as if determined to put a bold face on the matter and to brave it out. He walked at once up to the table at which were seated Sir Charles Fairland and the other gentlemen, and

with a high tone and haughty demeanour asked how they had dared issue a warrant to arrest him, who was their equal in rank and character, and what they had to lay to his charge.

The presiding magistrate, a formal old gentleman, very coolly replied: 'Pray, Mr. Graves, do not give way to angry feeling. Pray do not be thus excited. You will have a full and dispassionate hearing by-and-by. Pray, sir, be seated. We are gentlemen, and would wish to treat you as such. Sir, the laws of England consider every man as innocent till he is proved guilty. Do not, therefore, fancy we would anticipate justice. You are entitled to the full benefit of such laws; and these worthy and upright magistrates here assembled, and representing His Majesty's person, would wish you to receive not only the advantage of those laws but the courtesy of the bench. Gentlemen (turning to the bench), do I not speak your feelings?'

The magistrates, one and all, gave their assent by words and tokens of approbation; a most singular method of proceeding, but at the date of our narra-

tive the irregularity of a bench of country gentlemen was notorious. But the courtesy shown to Graves did not induce Mr. Noland to flinch one iota from the severity of his examination, nor from bringing forward the evidence which he had collected with great shrewdness and unwearied zeal. We go at once to the more serious and important part of the charge.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Mr. Noland, solemnly, ‘believe me, it is with unfeigned concern on Mr. Graves’ account, as well as on account of the feelings of Sir Charles Fairland and all here present, that I am about to adduce evidence and examine the same on a most fearful, most awful charge against the gentleman in custody. He is suspected of having devised and caused to be carried into effect the murder of the late Sir John Fairland.’

Graves did not raise his eyes to meet those of Mr. Noland, but he turned pale. He retained, however, his self-command, and said, in a quiet manner, ‘Suspicion is no proof; a charge so dreadful as this must be made good, or must altogether fail.’

‘It must be so, indeed,’ replied Mr. Noland, ‘and I am glad that Mr. Graves at once takes it in its true light. He may be sure he will have justice. Pray, Mr. Tapum,’ he added, turning to the constable, ‘pray give me the green bag which lies yonder on the side-table.’

The constable handed it over, and Mr. Noland fumbled in it for a few minutes. At length he produced a very handsome silver-mounted pistol. On seeing it, Graves exclaimed with fury, ‘Who has dared to seize my property? That pistol was at my bed’s head but yesterday!’

‘It was not seized without a magistrate’s warrant,’ said Mr. Noland, ‘enabling the officers to search Hartland Abbey, and to lay their hands on whatever might be deemed necessary towards investigating the charge in question. This pistol is known to be Mr. Graves’s; Sir Charles Fairland and others can depose to its being such. I must not put any questions that it might be injurious for Mr. Graves to answer in respect to his own case. I must not

ask him where is the fellow of that pistol. I have it in this bag.'

Mr. Noland opened it again, and now produced a second pistol, silver-mounted, and exactly corresponding in the maker's name and every other particular with the one already exhibited, differing only in this, that whereas the first was bright and in high order, the last produced was covered with rust, and looked as if its beautiful workmanship had been defaced by damp and ill-usage.

'Gentlemen,' said the attorney, 'one of my officers found *this* pistol in the bottom of an old pond, which I caused to be dragged, situated not very far from the Abbot's Oak in Hartland Forest. This pistol is the companion of the one known to be that of Graves. I have two witnesses belonging to the household of the Abbey who will prove that *both* pistols were seen in his chamber a day or two previous to the murder of Sir John Fairland, and only one of them has been there seen since that fatal event. Tapum, call forward Mr. Tournequet, the surgeon who attended Sir John Fairland in his last hours.'

The surgeon deposed to the wound by which Sir John met his death being one from a pistol shot. He then produced the ball he extracted, and showed that it exactly fitted the pistol taken from the pond. He next produced the piece of wadding which had stuck in the waistcoat of the deceased, and had not passed into the body with the ball.

Most carefully did Mr. Noland unfold this, and lay it open on the table before the magistrates. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I must now call your attention to a most important piece of evidence. I must beg the closest attention to the circumstance about to be adduced.'

Once more did Mr. Noland resort to the green bag, and produced a packet very carefully tied with pink tape and sealed. He directed the constable to take it and break the seals. This ceremony was accordingly performed by Mr. Tapum in solemn silence.

'Gentlemen, the papers now about to be produced,' continued Mr. Noland, 'were taken by the officers from a private drawer in Mr. Graves's bureau, which

stands in the closet adjoining his chamber at the Abbey.'

Graves frowned, but said nothing, knowing that all remonstrance concerning such seizure of his goods and papers would be fruitless.

'Gentlemen,' continued Mr. Noland, 'the first thing that I produce is an old newspaper, "The London Mercury" of the twentieth of April of the current year. Gentlemen, you perceive that a piece has been carelessly torn off from the corner of this newspaper. You will also perceive that the fragment which formed the wadding of the ball that shot Sir John Fairland exactly corresponds with the tear.' Mr. Noland then placed the two pieces together ; their union was perfect, wanting only a very small portion.

Graves became exceedingly agitated, and exclaimed with fierceness that his pistol had been stolen from his chamber, and must have been thrown into the pond by the thief. It was injustice, it was madness, to suppose him to be answerable for a piece of an old newspaper, which he declared he did not so much as know was in his possession.

One of the magistrates advised him not to enter on particulars, but to reserve his defence either in reply to the present charge when concluded before the magistrates, or for a higher court, when the case would be in the hands of his counsel.

The pistols, the ball, and the wadding were once more carefully restored to the green bag, as matters of evidence. And now Mr. Noland called on Sir Charles Fairland to come forward.

Sir Charles rose from his seat; strong emotion appeared in every line of his fine and expressive features as he looked on Graves with a feeling of horror that was almost sickening.

‘Mr. Graves,’ he said, ‘I know that in addressing you I am acting somewhat irregularly; but I wish to assure you that, whatever may be my own thoughts or sufferings at the sight of one who stands accused of having cut short the days of my father, I will endeavour to restrain myself. I will endeavour to follow the example of my friend Mr. Noland, and in seeking justice to seek it calmly and temperately. These papers which Mr. Noland but now handed

over to me, I understand, were found by him in making a more particular search than had hitherto been made in my lamented father's *escritoire*. Mr. Noland discovered certain private drawers, so closely constructed that none but a man of his nice observation would have detected them.'

'Pardon me, gentlemen,' said the old lawyer; 'I do not know that I should have detected them any more than Sir Charles had I not remembered a certain *escritoire* that was once the property of my great uncle. It came from abroad, and was of curious construction. I had often, when young, seen its secrets disclosed. On the death of the original possessor his widow sold many of his choice pictures and rare pieces of foreign furniture, among them this very *escritoire*, which must have been purchased by Sir Charles's grandfather, old Sir Thomas Fairland. The moment it came into my charge I suspected, and at length recognised, it as the acquaintance of my youth. A very little time and care in the examination of it brought to my remembrance the secrets of its curious construction. The papers Sir Charles now

holds in his hand were the first fruits of my search.'

'Those papers,' said Sir Charles, 'must have been deposited in the secret drawers of this escritoire by my father himself. How he came by them he could alone have told; that they produced the strongest effects on his mind may be traced in the few but impassioned remarks that he wrote in pencil on more than one of them. They are letters addressed by Mr. Graves to my stepmother. Their contents show the existence of a most extraordinary confederacy with her, and that it was of some standing. In these papers Graves also glances at the hope he entertains of one day becoming her husband, should death take the old baronet, as he calls him, out of the way. He also tells her his fears that, in consequence of my father beginning to think better and more kindly of me and my sisters than heretofore, he may be led to make another will; and unless this can be prevented, it will be a hard matter for her, and her two children, as well as for Mr. Graves himself. In another letter he speaks in terms of hatred and

contempt of my father—and wishes him out of the world. I will not offer even a remark on such ingratitude, such baseness. To God and to the laws of his country do I leave Mr. Graves, certain that an all-seeing and all-righteous Judge who vindicates His truth even here will never pass crimes such as these unavenged.'

Sir Charles sat down, greatly moved. He returned the letters to Mr. Noland, who, according to their dates, read them aloud to the magistrates, together with the comments of the late Sir John Fairland. The papers were then placed in the green bag, as evidence for a future day.

Graves, who had some talent but far more effrontery, with a hardened brow and resolute air, observed that there was nothing in those letters that could support the capital charge made against him. In alluding to the death of Sir John Fairland (a man getting up in years, and somewhat paralytic) his meaning was obvious—that, in case such death occurred, he should have no objection to marry the widow, who was likely to be a woman of good pos-

sessions. He then, with the utmost coolness, asked if Mr. Noland had done with him, or if he had anything more to bring forward.


‘Only one other witness,’ replied Mr. Noland, and calling the constable aside, he whispered in his ear. The official left the room, and soon returned, bringing with him a man of a very rude aspect, his beard and hair black and matted ; he was dressed in seaman’s clothes, worn and tattered ; altogether he had a wild and disordered appearance. His cap was in his hand, and he walked directly to the end of the table.

‘James Wilson, your Worship,’ said the constable.

At hearing this man named, Graves, who hitherto had sat with looks cast on the ground, raised his head and started as his eyes met those of Wilson, who now turned towards him with a dogged air, as a sort of inward exultation seemed to express itself in a play of the features the most sinister and insulting. It was the more striking as, under ordinary circumstances, the countenance of Wilson was stern and immovable in its fierceness. Graves turned

pale as death at the sight of this man, his eyelids quivered, a tremor passed over his whole frame, and a slight involuntary motion of the lips showed how strong was the shock he had experienced. In the surprise of the moment he ejaculated his name—‘James Wilson!’ but after that maintained a silence which seemed to result from his confusion of mind, not knowing where to turn or what to do at so unlooked for a crisis. He composed himself, however, to hear with almost breathless attention every word that followed during the examination of this witness.

Wilson was far more the master of himself, and seemed perfectly indifferent as to who questioned him, his chief care being his own safety. All preliminaries past, he proceeded to give his evidence in a clear and consistent manner, and said nothing that laid him open to any very close cross-examination. He admitted he had belonged to a gang of smugglers, and that he was present at the fray on the beach when the revenue officer was killed, but declared that he had no hand in taking his life. As to the business of Sir John Fairland, it was altogether another thing.



‘You knew, then, that an attempt was to be made on the life of Sir John Fairland?’ said Mr. Noland; ‘how did you know it?’

‘Mr. Graves there first spoke to me on the matter; but I didn’t like the job, and so he gave me a guinea, sent me away, and said I was to think no more about it, and he should do the same.’

‘And how did you know that Mr. Graves afterwards proposed it to Robert Williams, as you last night declared he did?’

‘Robert Williams,’ continued the witness, ‘often takes a cup too much, and when he does so he is apt to talk. He told me that Graves had told him of the warrant which Sir John Fairland had issued to take him on the score of killing the revenue man with his cutlass; and, moreover, that Sir John swore he would never let the matter rest till he had Williams hanged for the business. He said that Mr. Graves had worked up his blood against Sir John, and advised him to be even with him before he should be taken, and could not help himself; and that he gave him five guineas, and bade him waylay Sir John Fairland in the

forest, and shoot him. When Williams made answer that the lock of his own pistol was broke, Graves offered him one of his, so he would but do the job out of hand ; and told him to make all safe after the hing was done, he had best throw away the pistol in the deep pond.'

It may seem strange, indeed, that hearsay evidence such as the above should for a moment have been admitted. We think it right, therefore, to state more fully than we have already done that at the date of our narrative country magistrates were, generally speaking, very different to what they are at the present time ; not only hearsay evidence, but even the most irrelevant was frequently received before them with the utmost attention, and as matter of no less importance than testimony bearing directly upon the subject of investigation.

All the circumstances, therefore, which James Wilson declared he heard from Robert Williams were noted down with the utmost alacrity. All eyes turned on Graves, who, hardened as he was, evidently quailed at the perilous position in which he

stood, as evidence on evidence rose up against him with all the force of truth. Nevertheless, he still preserved an unbroken silence, probably thinking it best to do so after the hint Mr. Noland had given him not unadvisedly to betray himself.

The magistrates and Mr. Noland continued their enquiry. One old gentleman, who deemed himself particularly skilful in such business as the present, asked Wilson to declare openly what motives had induced him to come forward as a witness. Wilson replied that his principal motive was his own safety, which he knew would be secured by turning King's evidence. But he admitted he had a grudge against Graves, who paid him, he said, 'like a niggard for some fine Genoese velvets, and for some of the best claret wine he ever got on shore, which he had run at the hazard of his life.' He allowed he had no reason to wish Graves should be spared, yet repeated that was not the cause of his now coming forward against him.

On being further questioned very closely, he let fall some expressions by which it appeared that his

suspicious of Graves and Robert Williams being the murderers of Sir John Fairland had preyed on his mind ; but what had decided him to come forward and tell all he knew was a thing he did not like to speak about. He felt sure something not of this world had crossed him in the forest ; he was certain it had come upon him because he had such a secret in his keeping. Ever since the hour that terrible thing, be it what it might, had crossed him in the forest he had made up his mind to speak out, let the consequences be what they would.

All this was drawn from Wilson with some difficulty, so great was his reluctance. He seemed half afraid and half ashamed to confess that a strong superstitious feeling possessed his mind. The chief, therefore, though not the only, cause of the voluntary deposition of James Wilson was that he had seen, or fancied he had seen, the Spectre Horseman.

The evidence closed. Mr. Noland again rose from his seat, and intimated that he had another and most important subject to bring forward, which he thought bore collaterally upon the case. At all events,

whether it did so or not, he could no longer keep it back, as it was one he could wish should be publicly known, and he felt assured that all there assembled would receive the communication with heartfelt satisfaction.

‘Sir Charles Fairland,’ he said, addressing the young baronet, ‘allow me, in the presence of God and of these honourable men, to place in your hands a document which I also discovered in the secret drawer of that escritoire so much the object of investigation. It is a WILL, a very short one, but clearly drawn and duly executed ; it is in the handwriting of your father. The instrument is dated but a few days before his death. He states in brief but strong terms that he has discovered the truth—the plots and machinations by which his wife and Mr. Graves raised in his mind such prejudices against the children of his first marriage as induced him to well nigh disinherit them. He says that, in case anything should happen to him before he could make a more full and formal will, he writes the present with his own hand. In it he gives everything, land, money, plate, jewels, all to you,

his eldest son, Charles John Fairland, with a request that you will provide for your own sisters, and as you may think fit for the offspring of the second marriage. Lady Fairland is not even named amongst those to be provided for at your discretion. All here present will, I am confident, unite with me in rejoicing that the eldest son of the house of Fairland has thus been put in possession of his rights, and that with the title and honours he will inherit the estates of his forefathers.'

The magistrates and all the gentlemen assembled, with the warmest expressions of sympathy, congratulated Sir Charles on the discovery of the will.

He was much affected as he thanked them, and added: 'Indeed, Mr. Noland, grateful as I am to Providence for this good turn of fortune, I feel not the value of the thing itself half so much as I do the proof that my father gave at the last of his revived affection, not only for me, but for the memory of my dear mother. It is this which must plead my excuse for the strong feelings that at the present moment unman me'—he turned aside and wiped the tears from his eyes as he spoke.

Mr. Noland resumed: 'I do not imagine that Mr. Graves knew of the existence of this document; but his own letters addressed to Lady Fairland, and discovered by Sir John, show that he feared the execution of some such will. And as Thomas Wakeum has deposed that Mr. Graves knew as well as he did that Sir John was much engaged at his escritoire for several days previous to his death, Mr. Graves might fear that a will contrary to his own wishes was deposited somewhere therein. To no other circumstance can Mr. Graves' determination to retain the escritoire be ascribed.'

Here the case closed. Graves was called upon to state anything he might have to say in his defence. But probably finding the evidence too clear against him for his own unskilful comments to shake it, he only replied that he should put the cause of an innocent man into better hands than his own to defend it, and sank again into sullen silence, and so was committed to take his trial for life or death.

What remains may be briefly told. Justice was not robbed of her due. Robert Williams being secured on

the day of the examination, he, with Richard Graves, was tried and capitally convicted; but only he suffered the last penalty of the law, for the wretched Graves anticipated his just award, being found dead in his cell the day after conviction, with every evidence of poison. No one knew, nor was it ever ascertained, by what means he became possessed of the drug which destroyed him. Thus, indeed, was the murder of Sir John Fairland most fearfully avenged.

Sir Charles, with that warmth and generosity which had ever marked his character in all the trials of his past life, bestowed on each of his own sisters a very handsome portion; he also provided liberally for the brother and sister of the half-blood; and by placing them under the care of qualified persons to give them a good education, and far removed from the pernicious example of their guilty mother, did more for them in the end than he had previously done by the gifts of worldly fortune.

Lady Fairland, no longer young and attractive, and with none of those virtues or that intelligence

which render age amiable, or even respectable, disappointed in all her hopes and schemes, and struck with a late and ineffectual remorse, found her life a burthen almost too heavy to be borne. Sunk in her own eyes, pointed at by the finger of scorn, and hated by all the world, she wished only for the grave wherein to hide her dishonoured head, and yet feared that last rest of the miserable because of an hereafter, which her own conscience presented to her in a terrible light.

In this state she became more an object of pity than of anger with Sir Charles Fairland. The generous never bruise the broken reed nor quench the smoking flax. He sought her, settled upon her an annuity sufficient for comfort and independence, and gave her good counsel, together with his father's copy of the Holy Scriptures. Soon after this he sent a worthy clergyman, a particular friend of his own, to talk with her, in the hope to lead her mind in the right way, and induce her to seek better prospects with better feelings than she had known in the days of her pride and prosperity.

Sir Charles likewise promised that, whensoever he could feel assured that her repentance was confirmed by a consistent life in the paths of virtue and religion, he would allow her the comfort of occasionally seeing her children.

For Sir Charles Fairland himself, as soon as his affairs were settled, and he had returned to and taken possession of Northleigh Hall, he wrote in affectionate terms to Mrs. Elford, and solicited her consent to his union with her niece. With a reply from the good aunt, he received also a letter from his beloved Isabella, confirming by the promise of a speedy gift of her hand the happiness he had already known in the possession of her heart.

Mr. Noland proceeded to draw the settlements according to his instructions with his accustomed precision. Feeling very uncomfortable at the prospect of living so far apart from his godson and friend (whose worldly welfare had been so much his own work), he considered the subject well, and bethought him whether he could not in a way of

his own become a member to the family, and once more return to the neighbourhood of Northleigh Hall. Mrs. Elford, the aunt of the fair Isabella, was very good-looking, fat, pleasant, and not too old, a person of much sense and an excellent manager, making the penny go far and well. She was a widow, Mr. Noland was a widower; neither of them had any children. The old lawyer took a week to consider the several points of the case. Whether or not he consulted his favourite authority, Judge Blackstone, on the occasion we cannot say; but certain it is, he bought a new wig, got his coat and shoes well brushed, and attired himself with more than his usual care. Then, taking in his hand his late father's gold-headed cane—a thing he so respected that he never used it except on state occasions—he clapt on his laced three-cornered hat, and sallied forth to pay his duty to Mrs. Elford. She happened to be at home and alone.

What passed at that meeting has not come down to us. But as Mrs. Morton, who was still alive and well (and by a good legacy from a wealthy relative in

much improved circumstances), was consulted about a wedding suit for Mrs. Elford, second only in the richness of the brocade and the elegance of the trimming to that undergoing the process of the fashioning and the decorating for her niece, Miss Isabella Fitzwarren, suspicions, conjectures, and reports began to circulate very freely. Some of the old maids, and of the young ones, too, who envied the prosperity of the fair Isabella, went so far as to say that Sir Charles had changed his mind, and was going to take the aunt instead of the niece to wife.

At length, however, the whole truth became apparent, when on the same day, in which Sir Charles Fairland led to the altar his youthful and lovely bride, Mr. Noland conducted his comely and somewhat more staid lady to the same sacred place of meeting. Both were married, and both were well pleased with the objects of their choice. On that grand day, also, Mrs. Morton, who was growing old, and who had been persuaded to let the wedding dresses be the last produced under her superintendence in the way of business, entered on the honoured and important duties

of housekeeper and family friend to Sir Charles and Lady Fairland.

Tom Wakeum, seeing that marrying made his young master and his old counsellor look so very happy, thought he would try it as well as his betters, and so he looked about him for a wife. There was a good-humoured cook at Northleigh Hall—and very good-humoured must the woman be who would keep her temper cool and unchanged when exposed to the daily roasting of herself, like her joints, before such a fire as that which blazed in the kitchens of Northleigh Hall a hundred and more years ago. Well, on this worthy person Tom Wakeum cast an eye of favour, and one day asked her, very civilly, would she take him for better or for worse. The mistress of the spit and ladle did not say no ; and therefore, without more courting or ceremony, on that same day he put in the bans, and his marriage was followed by his own elevation to the dignity of house steward.

Of the superstition concerning the Spectre Horseman, whose marvellous appearance, it was reported, helped to bring such mighty things to pass, we can

give a less clear account, or rather no account at all that will be deemed satisfactory. Some amongst the more knowing said that he was a human and a living being, who, connected with the lawless, only assumed the character of the supernatural in order to keep the path in the forest (consecrated by a wild tale of tradition) clear at night for the service of the smugglers. But most men, and among them certain of the grave and learned of the time, were of a very different opinion.

In short, the appearance, of whatever kind or order it might be, was held by the generality not to be of earth, but of something far below it or beyond it; even of the unseen and mysterious abode of the departed whose shadowy forms, man cannot tell wherefore, are occasionally, though rarely, permitted to revisit the earth, yet never to reveal the secrets of their awful and impenetrable abode. Be this as it may, that such a spectre did haunt the woods of Hartland near the old Abbey, one of whose superiors had there met with a violent death in the days of monastic rule, was a superstition,

devoutly credited even in the early part of the last century. No wonder, therefore, that in those days many among the peasantry, and some of the more educated classes, were so impressed with the apprehension of it, that not for their lives would they have passed the Abbot's Oak after dark, for fear of meeting the Spectre Horseman.

[SEPTEMBER 1871.]

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